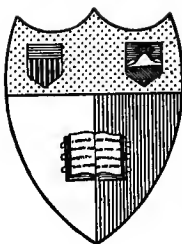


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TO
E. C. BENTLEY

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KENCOTE

I

THE narrow streets of the City resounded with the clangour of church bells. It was a sunny morning in late September, and such of the citizens of London as still resided within the boundaries were making their way, with their wives and families, to their respective parish churches, which were sometimes so close together that a stone thrown from one tower or steeple could have hit another.

The bells of the City still ring out on Sunday mornings and evenings, but they call few parishioners to church. The streets, so thronged on week days, are a desert; for the citizens of London now live elsewhere, and those that are left of the fine old dwelling-houses are let out into offices, and may deliver up the children of an occasional caretaker to the ministrations of religion, but never a well-to-do City family out of all those that used to inhabit them.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the exodus had already begun. City magnates lived in Bloomsbury or Holborn, or in the nearer suburbs, or had migrated to the pleasant villages of Dulwich or Hampstead, where they could enjoy complete rurality within a few miles of their offices and warehouses.

But there were some who clung to the old ways of living; and most of the tradespeople within the City boundaries still lived over their shops. So that on this fine Sunday morning the streets were quite respectably

filled with churchgoers, dressed in their sober best, most of whom were inclined to congratulate themselves on the return of the day which closed all the shops and offices and opened all the churches. For our great-grandparents were more regular in their habits than we are, besides being greater sermon-fanciers; and the weekly change of habit stood for a good deal to them for which nowadays we go farther afield.

Making for the fine church of St Stephen's, Wallbrook, hard by the Mansion House, was a family more typical of the City in appearance than it was in actuality. The head of it, John Clinton, a prosperous merchant in the silk trade, looked the part, indeed, to the life. He was not much past fifty, but with his portly presence and deliberate well-satisfied air he appeared to be a man of substance who was quite content with the position in which he found himself, and would feel out of place in any other. His wife, too, in her rich silks, which were yet not quite in the mode, would have been taken anywhere for a city dame; and her parentage was purely mercantile, not to say aldermanic. But John Clinton belonged by birth to the landed gentry, and came of a very old and honourable family. He had been apprenticed to trade in his youth, as was sometimes done in those days in the case of younger sons, and had prospered as a merchant by his own capacity and diligence. He loved the City, and still lived there; but whenever his eldest brother, who was unmarried and something of a rake, should die, he would succeed to the family estates, when he had every intention of transforming himself into as capable a country gentleman as he had been a City merchant.

The family with which this fortunate pair had been blessed, and which now accompanied them in their deliberate, arm-in-arm progress, consisted of three sons and one daughter.

The eldest son, a lean, hard-bodied young man in a military surtout, had just been invalided home from India, where he had been fighting and marching for four years under General Arthur Wellesley. The second had a look of freshness which seemed to bespeak a country rather than a town upbringing. He had been educated at the Merchant Tailors' School, and was shortly going on to St John's College at Oxford, with a view to Holy Orders and the family living. He was a good scholar, but his passion was for the sports of the field, which he had had more opportunities of enjoying than usually falls to the lot of city-bred youth; for he had spent many of his holidays with his uncle, the present rector of Kencote, in Meadshire, where lay the Clinton estates.

Neither of these two young men had any of the air of the City about them, but the third, who was still at Sir Roger Cholmeley's School at Highgate, where, being rather delicate, he had been sent on account of the good air, seemed cut out to succeed his father in business, as it was intended that he should do. He had a clever, rather sharp, but by no means cunning face, and much preferred spending his holidays within sound of Bow Bells than among the fields and woods that surrounded Kencote.

The little girl of seven, who held her mother's hand, and tripped it sedately, in her long high-waisted frock and bonnet trimmed with swansdown, was the prettiest fairy imaginable, and might be expected to turn the heads of whatever male society she should find herself in by-and-by, whether it was that of the city or the country.

The churches gradually filled, the clocks chimed the hour, and the bells ceased their clamour, which was taken up on a more subdued note by the drone of organs and the singing of choirs and congregations. The

autumn sun shone on the shutters and barred doors of the shops, and on streets nearly empty of human life, the few foot passengers hurrying along somewhat shamefacedly, as if aware that absence from church at that hour threw doubts at least upon their respectability, if not upon their orthodoxy.

This consideration did not appear to affect the occupant of a smart-looking cabriolet which drove down Cheapside an hour or two later, just as the first efflux from the churches was beginning. He was a man at first sight young, at second middle-aged, if not elderly. He was foppishly dressed, and wore his hair in the new style, curled and pomatumed but not powdered. Probably it was his only by purchase, for its light brown tinge belied the crowsfeet that showed on his face, although it was in accord with his slim laced-up figure.

The high-stepping horse was drawn up with a flourish before the door of John Clinton's handsome porticoed house in Bucklersbury, the diminutive groom hopped from his perch to ring the bell, and, when it was answered, took his place at the horse's head, while his master entered the house, not without elderly bendings and adjustments of legs and back.

He was shown into a severely furnished parlour, and by his expression, which was one of boredom and some contempt, did not appear to find himself in congenial surroundings. Not to keep so important a personage any longer unIntroduced—he was John Clinton's eldest brother, owner of Kencote and all its wide lands, but a resident there as little as possible and a landlord who considered his duty towards his tenants accomplished when he had taken as much from them as he could, and given as little as possible in return.

He was known as Beau Clinton, had been a dashing man about town for the past thirty years and more,

and a crony of that pattern of royal grace and virtue, the Prince of Wales, for longer than most of his kidney managed to retain the somewhat precarious position. He had run through a fine fortune years before, had piled up mortgages on Kencote as long as any one could be found to advance money on it, and was getting deeper into debt every day. But he had always kept the highest company and lived in the most fashionable part of the town, and could hardly be expected to wait in a citizen's parlour without showing some signs of disgust, even though that citizen was his own brother, of blood as good as his, who had been steadily amassing a fortune while he had been dissipating one.

He was at the window when his brother and his family returned from church, and saw the disapproval on the Merchant's face as he looked at the smart equipage standing before his door.

But John Clinton came into the room, followed by his family, with no trace of that disapproval visible. The Merchant did not approve of the Beau, but he was his eldest brother and the head of his house, and would always be given a welcome whenever he honoured him with a visit.

He was now cordially pressed to stay and dine, but while he politely concealed his disgust at the idea of a man of his fashion eating his dinner at such a time of the day, and within an hour of his having taken his morning chocolate, his refusal was firm. He had come to see his brother on a little matter of business, and must then be getting back to the other end of the town. But he was not in such a hurry as to refrain from a few compliments to his sister-in-law, a word or two to each of his nephews, and the graceful presentation of a box of French sweetmeats to his little niece. Then the family filed out of the room, and the brothers were left alone together.

'I do not like transacting business on the Lord's Day, Richard,' said the Merchant, as he closed the door, 'and if yours has anything to do with raising money, as seems probable, I must tell you at once that your visit will be wasted.'

The good man was ruffled at the refusal of his hospitality, and his patience with his brother's financial habits had long since worn thin.

'La, my dear Jack!' replied the Beau, 'how you take one up! It is a very small matter I have come to you about, and I have something to tell you at which you will be as pleased as I. You have always twitted me with neglecting Kencote, and perhaps with some reason. But I have secured an honour for our house which has not come to us before. His Royal Highness intends making a tour through the country to visit the mansions of some of his friends among the high nobility, and he has done me the honour of including Kencote. None of his other hosts will be under the rank of an earl, and I am naturally pleased with this mark of royal condescension.'

That the Merchant was not particularly pleased with it might have been gathered from his face. But he would not say a word against one who must very shortly become his sovereign.

'Well, and what then?' he asked.

'What then? Why the house must be done up, and some of the rooms refurnished, and the Prince must be entertained in a way that will not compare unfavourably with that of the other houses he will visit. He will only be at Kencote one night, and I can do all that is necessary for a thousand pounds, but not less. But for the damnable luck I have had lately I should not trouble you about so small a matter; but——'

'A thousand pounds!' interrupted the Merchant. 'A thousand pounds for one night's lodging, and I am

to provide it, Richard, after all I have done for you, and for Kencote ! Why not ask for a hundred thousand at once ? The proposal is absurd, and you must have known that I should refuse it, as of course I do.'

The Beau slightly closed his eyes, as if in pain. 'My dear brother,' he said, 'you are so loud and rough. I protest that there is no need for it. Listen to me. The bulk of the money will go to restoring the house, which is in a devilish bad state of repair, and to refurnishing the apartments which the Prince will use. After my death—which it should desolate you to think of, but to which, no doubt, you are eagerly looking forward—Kencote will be yours, and you will get the benefit of this expenditure.'

'That is so,' said the Merchant, 'but you are quite wrong in thinking that I am looking forward to your death, and it is a wrong thing to say, Richard. It may be years before I succeed, and I hope it will be. I am very well content as I am for the present, and it is quite possible that I may die before you. But in the meantime I shall not spend money in doing up Kencote for your benefit, nor even that of His Royal Highness, if he proposes to stay there no more than one night; and you may take that as settled.'

The Beau closed his eyes again, with the gesture that so irritated his brother. 'There is another consideration,' he said. 'I have had no promises; no promises could be given. But our family is a devilish old one—a good deal older than that of most of the noble lords on whom our Prinny is to shed the light of his august countenance. When he comes to the throne, which must be very soon now, there will be honours to be bestowed on those who are worthy of them. I dare say you take me.'

The Merchant looked puzzled for a moment. Then his frown deepened. 'If it is a title you are angling

for, Richard,' he said, 'I think you should take shame on yourself for such an idea. We Clintons have been at Kencote for over five hundred years, and want no titles to gild our gentility; least of all titles that are bought. Besides, a title conferred on you would die with you. Why should it tempt me to give you money? I will not do so; and if you have nothing more to say to me I will now go to my dinner.'

The Beau knew enough of his brother to avoid wasting his time in persuasion, when he had expressed himself in this way. He rose from his chair with a languid, fine-gentleman air. 'I was about to say that it is not unknown for honours to be conferred with succession to brothers and nephews,' he said. 'But it is useless to talk to you when you are in your business mood. It is one I do not understand, and cannot cope with. I will wish you farewell, Brother Jack, and beg you to consider that I am not yet past the marriageable age, and——'

'You have held that threat over me before,' said the Merchant, now thoroughly angry. 'In God's name marry if you wish to, and settle down into a more worthy head of our family than you have yet shown yourself.'

'I will also say,' added the Beau, unmoved by this outburst, 'that there are ways of raising the pitiful sum you have refused me which will probably suit you less than lending it to me would have done. His Royal Highness will come to Kencote, and will be suitably entertained there. Good-morning, Brother Jack.'

II

SOMEWHAT restored to his equanimity by a good dinner, the Merchant sat over his wine with his two elder sons.

The Beau had succeeded in offending all three of

them. Young Thomas had fought with distinction at Assaye, and been wounded at Argaum, rather seriously. His uncle had had little to say about that, but had asked after various young lordlings campaigning with the Guards, or on the staff of General Wellesley, whom he, as ensign in a regiment of the line, had not been likely to meet.

Young Giles had taken a scholarship from the Merchant Tailors' School to St John's College, and the Beau had expressed regret that he had not been sent to Eton and to Trinity College at Cambridge, at which aristocratic foundations he himself had laid the foundations of his spendthrift career.

Their father had once more been outraged at being treated with disdain as a mere 'cit,' by a brother who, if he had worthily fulfilled his responsibilities, would have been a richer man than he was, and who had allowed the fine house in which they had been brought up together to sink from its honourable state into one of almost entire desertion. It was this contemptuous treatment that always aroused his gorge. If his brother had come to him in a proper way, he might have let him have the money that he wanted; for it was true that he would eventually have the benefit of its main expenditure, and he would not have been averse to seeing Kencote honoured by a visit from his future sovereign, although his personal opinion of him was not of the highest.

Now, however, he was actively incensed against the idea, and still more so against his brother; so much so that he was ready to discuss him with his sons in a more open manner than would usually have been considered becoming in those days.

'I think nothing of his threat to marry,' he said. 'He would not marry except for money, and he has little to offer in exchange for that now, whatever may

have been the case twenty or thirty years ago. It is his threat to raise money in a way that I shall object to that I fear. What will he do? He cannot raise another penny on mortgage.'

'He can sell timber, sir,' said Thomas.

'That has been considered before,' said the Merchant, 'and I have been able to stop it.'

'It is being considered again now,' said Giles, who had returned from Kencote Rectory only the day before. 'A man has been staying at Bathgate and has constantly been through the woods at Kencote, measuring and valuing. Uncle Edward and I got it out of him what he was there for.'

The Merchant's face darkened. 'It is a disgraceful thing,' he said. 'He knows well enough that he cannot touch a stick of timber without my permission.'

'My uncle said that it would need a legal process, sir, to stop the timber being cut, and that the mischief might be done in the meantime.'

This was true, and the Merchant's face darkened still more. He would no doubt have legal redress if his brother exceeded his rights as tenant for life, but what was that worth against a man who was practically bankrupt.

'It would be a wicked thing to do,' he said. 'Kencote has been let down past all belief since my father's time, and if the timber were felled it would be beyond bringing round for another two generations.'

'I think there is little doubt, sir,' said Thomas, 'that it was timber-felling that he referred to when he threatened you. I had better hasten my visit to Kencote, and keep an eye on what is going on. I promise you, at least, that nothing shall be done without your hearing of it.'

After considerable discussion, this course was agreed upon. The young officer, too weak as yet to take the

journey on horseback, travelled down into Meadshire by the stage-coach. He reached the old market town of Bathgate on the second day, and his uncle, the Rector, met him with a chaise and drove him five miles along the miry roads to Kencote.

The Reverend Edward Clinton, unlike the majority of his family, was a considerable scholar. He was a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, had never married, but spent a happy life in his snug rectory with his fine library of books and his fine cellar of port. He had been something of a sportsman in his youth, but had grown indolent. Like all the Clintons, with the unfortunate exception of the reigning head of the family, he loved Kencote. The only bitter drop in his cup was the present state of the house and estate. The cottagers among his parishioners were in a bad plight, with roofs letting in the rain everywhere, and doors and windows letting in the wind. This concerned him chiefly because cottages were property, and it was part of the general state of affairs that those in the village of Kencote were being badly let down, with all the rest. In his youth, he and the large family of which he was the third son, had lived in the great house, and there had been merry times there, with coming and going of country neighbours, much lavish hospitality, and at least an outward air of prosperity among the peasantry, who had been souped and coaled and blanketed into some oblivion of low wages and inconvenient, though picturesque, dwellings. Now it was as if a blight had descended upon the pleasant countryside. The great house, which ought to have played a leading part among the other great houses of the neighbourhood, was shut up from year's end to year's end. Not a tenant but what was grumbling, not a wall or a roof or a gate or a fence but needed repair; and worst of all, not a whist table within reach, without taking out

a horse and braving the dreadful roads, which in those days were almost impassable in winter.

The Rector of Kencote was too much of a philosopher to allow these incidental drawbacks to weigh upon him. The roof of his own house was sound enough, and he had beneath it all the materials for the kind of life that suited him. But he had quarrelled fiercely with his brother, the Beau, on account of his treatment of Kencote, and felt considerable satisfaction in acting as watchdog over the place, so that its owner should get as much annoyance as might be over the neglect of his duties, and be restrained from depleting its revenues further than he was entitled to do.

'We've stopped my gentleman from poking his nose into the woods,' he chuckled to his nephew, as they bumped together over the rutty roads.

'How did you do it, sir?' asked Thomas.

'Oh, don't ask me, my boy. *I'd* nothing to do with it. Some of the villagers seem to have taken a dislike to him. I don't fancy they did him much harm. If he did get his head broken, they'll patch it up for him in London. That's where he's gone back to. Laid an information before me as a magistrate before he went; but it was a dark night—he'd lost his horse and cart, I don't know how—cart was found in a ditch next day—and he was walking back to Bathgate. I told him I'd do what I could, but unless he could identify the men who had set on him, I didn't think I could do much. Lots of bad characters about, I said. Wouldn't hear of its being any of *my* people. They wouldn't do such a thing—much too well taught.'

The Rector went off into a series of chuckles, and his nephew laughed heartily. Then he told his uncle about the prospective honour that was to be conferred upon Kencote.

'Now there are some men in my position,' said the

Rector, when he had digested the information, 'who would see a great stroke to be performed for themselves there. They would come bowing and scraping to his Royal Highness, and expect a bishopric to come of it, or at least a deanery. If the Prince comes here, I shall not go near him, Tom.'

'My father says he should be treated with respect.'

'I shall take myself off. I shall have an urgent call to go to Cambridge. The Beau will expect the village to collect and huzza, with me at the head of it. The village may do what it pleases, but it will get no help from me. My brother has played a bad part at Kencote for many years. It is not to be smoothed over, and everything to be made to look happy and prosperous for the occasion. Let him explain my absence to the Prince, if he can.'

Young Thomas heartily approved of this attitude. Kencote was as the breath of his nostrils to him. When he had lain out on the field of battle, during that long night, he had thought in his fever that he was wandering about its woods and meadows; and afterwards, a factor in his recovery had been the strong determination that he would not die and lose the happy lot that would one day be his, of living in the old house, and taking his pleasure over the broad acres that went with it.

He was not strong enough for much exercise yet, but he went out the next morning with a dog and a gun, along the village street, and into the park, through the principal lodge gates.

The house came immediately into view—a massive pile of red brick, flanked and fronted by high-walled formal gardens, of a date much older. The stately mansion which had been built at the same time as they had been laid out, had been burnt down about a hundred years before, and this one had been built in its place.

It was a fine, solid house, with great high square rooms, and many of them, but it did not suit the taste of that age, which had come to despise red brick, and often disguised it with the newly invented stucco. Nor were the Elizabethan gardens, with their wonderful clipped yews, bowling alleys, fish-ponds, and fountains, any longer admired. Taste had moved on to an artificial aping of nature, and many a beautiful pleasaunce of this sort had been swept away at the hands of 'Capability Brown' and his pupils, to make room for vast lawns, and carefully disposed groups of trees and shrubs.

But young Thomas saw little to complain of in house and garden as they were, if only they had been in decent repair. The gardens were a wilderness. The peacocks and pyramids and arcadings of yew were running wild, the paths were moss-grown, the knots and parterres full of weeds, the fountains choked. He stood by a broken sundial and looked up at the house, the brickwork of which wanted pointing, the woodwork repainting. All the windows were shuttered; no smoke went up from the chimneys. It was a dead husk of a house, forsaken and despised. And yet there were those who loved it, and looked upon it as their chief glory.

He turned away with a muttered expression of anger, and looked round on the well-treed park and the thick woods of the surrounding country. The foolish spendthrift who could leave all this beauty and dignity to rot and decay, while he took his pleasure in the narrow streets of a town, should not bring further ruin upon it, for the sake of an empty honour. The fleeting patronage of royalty was not what Kencote wanted, but the homage of those who would restore it to what it had once been—a home, second to none, in their eyes, in all the broad lands of England.

III

THE work began. Where had the money come from?

It was good to see the house aroused from its inglorious sleep. A host of workmen were busy about the structure; others were indoors, painting, papering, cleaning, restoring; others trimming up the neglected gardens, and re-making the road through the park, along which the royal visitor would drive, once when he came, once when he went away.

Young Thomas watched it all, established relations with the contractors, and acquired information. Although what work was being done was being well done, as all such work was in those days, the restoration was none the less being scamped—by order. Nothing was being done to the great expanse of roof, which needed a great deal doing to it; nothing was being done anywhere that would not make a show. All this money was being spent so that the house should look as if it were in perfect repair—for one day and one night. What should happen to it after that wouldn't matter.

It was an indignity. Kencote was being turned into a sham and a fraud.

Money was being paid regularly; the work would not have been undertaken otherwise. They knew the Beau, at Bathgate, where the workmen came from. That was made plain to young Thomas, who hid his chagrin, but vowed that they should come to know him under a very different aspect when he should stand where the Beau stood now.

The woods were untouched. Nothing more had been seen or heard of the valuer, who had not completed half his work when he had been driven out, in the way that had so puzzled the Rector. Neither he nor young Thomas believed that any deal in standing timber could

have been put through; and the merchant's lawyers had been busy. The woods were safe.

But the Beau had got money somehow, and was once more spending in London on his old scale. That he was in funds, for however short a time, meant mischief of some sort to Kencote, since Kencote was all he had on which to raise it; and those who came after him would have to foot the bill, sooner or later.

The Merchant was inclined to regret that he had not footed it promptly. The necessary work could have been done under his own eyes, and in such a way that it would not have to be done all over again by-and-by; and the Beau would not have been gaming at White's and Brooks's, as rumour reported him once more to be doing.

The Merchant chafed more and more as the days went by, the date of the royal visit drew nearer, and the post brought no news from Kencote to clear up the mystery.

IV

THE days went by. The Prince had set out upon his tour, accompanied by various of his friends, among whom was Beau Clinton. He was due at Kencote on a Friday evening, but the date of none of his visits was quite certain, as he was likely to linger in a house that suited him, and might cut out one here and there entirely. He was going as a private gentleman, and was not to be hampered by arrangements cut and dried.

On Wednesday evening the Merchant had been drinking tea in his wife's parlour. Giles was away at Oxford, John at school. Only little Betty was with her parents, sitting on a stool by her father's chair, reading in a book. He liked to have her by him, though he often sat silent for a long time together, busy with his thoughts, which his wife and daughter had both been

taught not to interrupt by intemperate chatter. He sat silent now, gazing into the fire, his hand sometimes caressing the child's fair head. Mrs Clinton plied a busy needle, and sometimes looked up fondly at her little daughter, and then questioningly at her husband's grave face. She knew what was now incessantly on his mind, but she could not help him in it. She could only keep quiet and wait for what was to come.

Upon this peaceful scene broke in Thomas. He was splashed with mud from head to foot, but looked splendidly strong and virile, as he stood before his parents, with all trace of his illness gone from him.

'The Prince arrives at Kencote this evening,' he said. 'His visit has been put forward two days. It was only known this morning that he was coming so soon.'

Thomas had ridden all the way from Kencote to London, a hundred and thirty miles, with only two changes of horses, and no rest. His mother would have him eat and drink, and went out of the room with the child while he told his father the news, still standing.

'I know now,' he said, 'where the money has come from. The valuation of timber was a blind to put us off the scent. He has sold everything in the house for three thousand pounds. It is to be stripped directly the Prince has paid his visit, and left it.'

The Merchant sprang from his seat, his eyes flashing. 'He would never commit such an outrage!' he cried, but knew as he said it that it was true.

Most of what the old house had contained in the way of heirlooms had been destroyed in the fire, but the Clinton who had rebuilt it had been a rich man, and had furnished it richly. Family pictures, and other treasures, had been added during the last hundred years, which were of value and interest to the Clintons who should inherit it, but of small value to anybody else. Three thousand pounds was a preposterous price

in any case for the contents of such a house, but it did not represent a quarter of their value to a member of the family.

Why had this outrage not been guarded against? And why had no suspicion crossed the minds of any of them that this was the source from which the Beau's funds had come? Partly because their minds had been running on the Kencote timber, directed thereto by the trickery of the Beau himself; but chiefly because, cynically selfish as he was, he was yet a Clinton, and it would have seemed incredible that he should deal such a blow to the honour of his house.

But he had done it. The Merchant very quickly recovered his outraged astonishment. The situation must be faced; and perhaps there was yet time to recover the final loss. 'He cannot sell the heirlooms,' he said shortly. 'The rest is his, but it would be difficult to disengage it. We may be able to upset the sale. How did you know of it?'

'All that will keep, sir,' said Thomas. 'There is no doubt about the facts. My advice to you is to set out for Kencote now, at once.'

He had remained standing. He spoke quickly, but with great determination. His father, active although deliberate in mind, was yet declining to the bodily inertness of middle age, which was enhanced by the sedentary life he had led for many years. But he responded now to the young man's quickening. 'What to do?' he asked.

'Why, to confront my uncle before the Prince himself, if necessary. You will catch him at a disadvantage. Besides, the matter is very pressing. The moment the Prince goes out of the house the people who have bought the contents of it have a right to step in and carry them off. I would have you start at once, sir, within the hour. You can post, and be at Kencote

before the Prince leaves for Kemsale. If he has already left, you can follow him there. My uncle goes with him to my Lord Meadshire's. I will come with you, if you give your leave.'

'I will go, Thomas,' said his father, after a moment's hesitation. 'But you cannot do the journey again within an hour of your having ridden here.'

The young man laughed. 'I would go twice as far for the chance of saving our house,' he said. 'A little meat and wine while you prepare yourself, and I shall be ready when you are.'

An hour later father and son were in a post-chaise, on the road to Bathgate

V

THE travellers reached Bathgate at seven o'clock in the evening of the following day, and on horseback. They had escaped the perils of highwaymen, but those were about the only vicissitudes contingent to such a journey that they had escaped. Much rain had fallen, and once off the great trunk roads the going was execrable. Here and there they had difficulties in getting relays of horses, and time was wasted. One of the postboys was drunk, and took them off the road in the darkness. Thomas, when he found it out, pushed him off the saddle and left him by the side of the road, while he made his own way back. Two hours were lost over this. When day dawned they had not gone much more than forty miles, and there were ninety more to go. But their troubles were not ended. A wheel came off as they were crossing the high lonely downs which border the county of Meadshire, and they were landed in a ditch, both horses being lamed in the ensuing mêlée. The travellers had to walk six

miles to the next posting-house, and there they took horse and rode the rest of the way.

The Merchant was tired out when they reached Bathgate, but his strong spirit upheld him. Thomas seemed as fresh as when he had started, and was very tender to his father, sparing him all that he could, but always pressing on. The Merchant could not have done the journey without him. They rode up to the inn at seven o'clock, and ordered a chaise to take them to Kencote. They could not hear whether the Prince and his party had proceeded to Kemsale, which lay on the other side of Kencote. They ate and drank hurriedly while the chaise was being prepared. 'If they have left Kencote by the time we get there,' said Thomas, looking at his father, 'we must rest, and follow them to-morrow.'

The Merchant was already refreshed. 'They must have left,' he said. 'But we will follow them to-night.'

The five miles that lay between Bathgate and Kencote were soon covered. Thomas slept soundly until they reached the village. His father sat thinking. He must keep his wits about him for what was to come.

There were lights in doors and windows of the cottages, and a group of villagers hanging about the entrance gates. Then the Prince had not left yet. The chaise was stopped and the question asked. He was to have gone two hours before, but no signs of departure had yet become apparent.

They drove through the gates, along the newly made road through the park, and into the great stable-yard. It was full of bustle—carriages standing there, some of them already horsed, men running to and fro with lanterns and lights everywhere. A groom told them that no orders for departure had come out yet, though they were expecting them at any time.

They entered the house by a door at the back. The Merchant meant to walk straight into whatever room

his brother was in, and no doubt his royal guest with him. He and Thomas were plastered with mud, their clothes and hair in disorder, their faces unwashed and unshaven—hardly figures to appear before Royalty. But as they strode along the echoing stone corridors, there was a dignity and authority about them that prevented any of the servants whom they met from stopping them. The back regions of the house seemed to be full of servants; they stared, hesitated, and let them pass.

They came through a door into the great square hall of the house. The black and white marble pavement was partly covered with a fine new Turkey carpet; the carvings and panels of the woodwork had been repainted, the frames of the pictures regilded. This work, at least, was good, and permanent, but it had already served its turn. To-morrow, only the bare walls were to be left, if the Beau had his way.

All round the hall were tall pedimented doorways, framing solid mahogany doors. The Merchant strode towards the one that opened into the dining-room, his son following him. A lackey in a laced coat came running up to stop him, but he pushed him aside, and both of them went into the room, shutting the door in his face.

VI

ALTHOUGH the room was very large, and was lit only by wax tapers, there were so many of them that the effect was at first dazzling. A group of men sat and stood at the farther end of the table, on which was a great show of silver plate, with piled-up fruits, decanters of wine, and branched candlesticks, whose lights were reflected in the dark polished mahogany.

The Prince sat in the place of honour, a stout, bewigged figure in black, his neck tightly swathed in

voluminous folds of cambric, his round face swelling up out of it like a great over-blown flower. The Beau sat at the head of the table, half-facing him. These two were the centre of the group. The Beau was shaking a dice-box, and looked up to see his brother and nephew standing there as the dice fell on the table.

In the confusion that followed—the Beau expressing outraged horror, some of the others moving to prevent the disordered, mud-splashed figures from approaching the august presence, the Prince staring in surprise, not unmixed with alarm—the Merchant's thoughts cleared, and he knew what he wanted to do.

He advanced a few paces into the room, and made a low bow. 'Your Royal Highness,' he said in a clear voice. 'I and my son have ridden from London to ask justice of you against my brother, Richard Clinton, who has served me a vile trick under the shelter of your Royal Highness's name.'

The Beau was in a fury. He spluttered his anger at his brother's daring to enter the royal presence in such a state, and made towards the bell, to summon servants to turn him out of the room, and out of the house.

The Merchant stood on his ground. 'With the utmost respect,' he said, 'I ask your Royal Highness to hear me, and judge between my brother and me.'

The Prince had recovered his equanimity. It tickled his vanity to be appealed to in this way. He stirred his large body in his chair, and held up a plump hand covered with rings to the Beau, who had reached the bell-pull by the mantelpiece.

'Wait a while,' he said. 'Let us hear what your good brother has against you, Dick. I have always known you were a proper rascal, and I should like the opinion of a member of your family upon the subject. Your name and condition, sir, as a preliminary to the tale.'

'My name is John Clinton, sir. I am a merchant in

the City of London, but I am also descended of the family that has been seated on this Manor of Kencote for five hundred years, and heir presumptive to its estates. They were granted by your Royal Highness's great ancestor, Edward I. The founder of our house was knighted by the King on the field of Falkirk, and Kencote has descended in the direct line ever since.'

'A very respectable pedigree,' said the Prince, probably not ill-pleased to be reminded of his own somewhat zigzag descent from the great Kings of England. 'A better one than yours by some centuries, I think, George.'

He turned towards a young man, not much older than Thomas, who stood by his elbow, dressed very soberly but very exquisitely, with a supercilious look on his face. He showed no sign of confusion at being addressed in this way, or at the laughter of his companions. 'The name of Brummell is what I have made it,' he said. 'I owe nothing to my ancestors, or to anybody else.'

Considering that the Prince's favour had launched him on his career of fashion, this was pretty pointed; but he and his royal patron had already begun to fall out, and this was actually the last time that he was to appear in his most intimate circle.

The Prince took no notice of his speech. 'Your long descent has already been brought to my notice, Mr Clinton,' he said, 'and when you came in we were at the point of discussing whether it would not be fittingly graced with some mark of honour.'

The Merchant's eye fell upon the dice lying on the table at his elbow. The Beau, who still held the dice-box in his hand, intervened. 'I can assure you, sir,' he said, 'that the little matter of dispute between my brother and myself is not worthy of your attention. Let us continue our—discussion.'

There was a general laugh at this. 'He is within three throws of his Earldom,' said a handsome

dissipated-looking man on the Prince's right. 'I suggest that if he wins it, his patent shall be made out to include his brother, the citizen, who looks far more capable of continuing his honourable line than he does himself.'

The company began to talk and laugh among themselves at this, but the Prince seemed anxious to preserve the air of dignity with which he had begun. 'We will first hear what the worthy citizen has to say against the unworthy Beau,' he said. 'Before you unfold your tale, Mr Clinton, you will be better for a glass of wine—you and your son too. Please drink it sitting.'

He motioned him towards a chair, and a fair-haired young man, with a pleasant expression of face, hastened to pour out two glasses of wine for them.

The Merchant, deeply angered at what had been going on when he entered the room, but hiding his anger, stood his ground. 'I am deeply sensible of your Royal Highness's condescension,' he said. 'But I come here as a plain man to plead my cause, not to intrude myself into the company of my betters. Whatever rank we Clintons may have held in the past, we have lived for some generations as quiet country gentlemen, not as men and women of fashion. We have done our best for our tenantry, and we have loved our home. My brother has done neither, and now, as a last injury to his family, he has taken upon himself to sell everything that this house contains. The very chair upon which your Royal Highness is sitting, the bed upon which you have slept, the glass from which you drink, with everything else, have been turned into money to jingle in his pockets.'

There was a shout of laughter. 'So that's where you get your funds, Dick!' said the man on the Prince's right. 'His goods and chattels against an earldom that he'll have nothing to support!' said another. 'What a roystering blade it is!'

The Prince laughed with the rest. The Beau threw himself into a chair, and plunged his hands into his breeches pockets. 'Tis true,' he said, with an air of indifference, 'and 'tis nothing. I would have bartered my barrack of a house itself for a visit from his Royal Highness. It shames me not at all. What does shame me is that this pettifogging tradesman who calls himself my brother, should have obtruded himself into his Royal Highness's presence to flourish the bill in his face. He can think of nothing but the bill; but it is not for his paying, and it is an outrage that he should mention it in this company.'

The Prince looked uncomfortable. He must have known that his friend, the Beau, could not afford to entertain him at all, and it could not have been pleasant to him to have the cost of his entertainment brought before him. It was a shrewd stroke on the Beau's part.

The handsome young man who had poured out the wine leaned forward and looked from one brother to the other, as if to lose nothing of the duel that was being fought between them. Thomas, who had stood as if on parade slightly behind his father, had had his eye on this young man ever since he had been in the room. With his look of health and activity he did not seem to belong to this company, which, with the exception of the posturing Brummell, was made up of men of middle age, nearly all of them of dissipated appearance, and some of them not as sober as they might have been.

'Begging your pardon,' said the Merchant, 'the bill *will* be footed by me sooner or later, as you very well know. And I do not grudge it. It was not for that purpose that I——'

'You did grudge it,' interrupted the Beau, without looking at him. 'You are a rich man, and I came to you for a loan of the wretched sum that was necessary

to make my poor house fit for the honour that was to be conferred on it. You thought nothing about the honour, and refused me. If you have come all the way from London to tell his Royal Highness that, I think you had better have stuck to your office stool. What I have sold is mine to sell, and has nothing to do with you.'

The Prince's bilious looking eyes were fixed upon the Merchant with no great favour. 'If this is true, Mr Clinton,' he said, 'my inclinations are somewhat towards my friend who has entertained me so handsomely, and made no bother on it, rather than towards one who thought a visit from me of small account.'

'He has stuck to his desk and made money,' added the Beau, pursuing his advantage. 'I have spent mine in the best of company, and I don't grudge a farthing of it. Tell him to go back to his shop, sir, and worry us no longer.'

'What is it that you want of me, Mr Clinton?' asked the Prince.

The Merchant glanced round upon the company. The faces of most of them showed amusement at the awkward position in which he stood, and some showed contempt. Only the handsome young man looked at him with sympathy.

'I will not deny that I refused,' he said boldly. 'For five-and-twenty years this house of Kencote has been neglected, and the land that goes with it starved. Five-and-twenty years ago it was a house that a Royal Prince might well have taken a pleasure in visiting. It is so no longer, and I would not support my brother in giving it a false air, for a few hours only.'

'A careful man, this,' observed Brummell, looking at him and Thomas through his quizzing-glass. 'And he's brought his groom with him to protect his money bags on the journey. But why should the groom be introduced into this company?'

It was perhaps Thomas's cold glances of contempt that had aroused him to this wanton and foolish attack. For Thomas had also been making comparisons. Brummell and the fair young man were the only members of the company of about his own age. The one he admired for his fresh and open expression and his look of health and activity. The other, of whom he had heard something, and liked nothing that he had heard, seemed to him, who had already done something in the world, to be nothing but an idle conceited fop and lickspittle, aping a superiority to which neither birth nor achievement entitled him.

'I am not a groom,' he said quietly, looking Brummell straight in the face, 'though 'tis true that I can stick on a horse.'

As Brummell was known to have fallen off one, during his short career as a cavalry officer, and broken his nose by it, this stroke was well received by the company, and especially by the Prince. But the Merchant turned to his son and told him to be silent, and the Prince frowned again. 'What is it you want of me?' he asked, shortly. 'You have admitted that you did not want my presence here. We need have no more of that.'

The Merchant paused a moment. 'A hundred years ago,' he said, 'the house that stands where this house now stands was burnt down, and the Clintons suffered the loss of nearly all that it contained. The house was rebuilt and refurnished; for four generations we have enjoyed it. Now comes my brother—a scourge as destructive as the fire—to despoil us again. A word from your Royal Highness would stop the wicked deed. It is not too late. There must be irregularities; there are things here that he has no right to sell. I will repay the money that has already been handed over. I will relieve him of the responsibilities that he makes so light of. I will pay him an annuity as long as

he lives. Tell him, sir, to make Kencote over to me, and cease from troubling it further.'

'That I will not do,' put in the Beau. 'It has been suggested to me before. As long as I live I will be Clinton of Kencote.'

'Or Earl of Kencote,' put in the man on the Prince's right. 'Throw the Merchant and his son into the succession, sir, and let him settle for his goods and chattels afterwards.'

The Prince laughed and bestirred himself. 'It is your throw,' he said to the Beau. 'We will finish our own business and then turn to your brother's. Mr Clinton, you are concerned in this little affair. I accept the suggestion made to me on your behalf, and of your son, who can ride a horse.'

The Beau aroused himself and shook the dice-box. The Merchant took a step forward; his face was red and his eyes flashed. 'It is a disgraceful compact,' he said loudly. 'I will publish it to the world—our good King beset by England's enemies, and his son shaking dice, for money against honour!'

The company sprang to their feet, all except the Prince, who stared at the Merchant's angry face—his own also angered, scandalised, and alarmed.

'As for you,' said the Merchant, through the hubbub, to his brother, 'I shall appeal to the law. I have reason to believe that you have overstepped it.'

He turned on his heel and left the room, showing a full broad back to his future sovereign. Thomas followed him, after a glance at his enemy, who had kept a lofty air of indifference throughout the foregoing scene.

A group of servants had gathered in the hall; one of them, who had probably had his eye or ear to the keyhole, was nearly knocked over by the Merchant as he came out of the room. He pushed them angrily aside, and strode across the hall, his spurs clanking.

Before he had reached the door by which he had entered it, the fair-haired young man, who had followed them out of the room, laid his hand on his shoulder.

'Mr Clinton,' he said. 'I am Humphrey Kemsale, and very much at your service. Let us see this business through together.'

The Merchant, who had exclaimed angrily at the hand on his shoulder, stood still and looked at him, his face clearing a little as his eyes met the frank, friendly look of the young man. Lord Kemsale was the eldest son of the Marquis of Meadshire, and the two houses of Kemsale and Kencote had been allies for generations, though of late one had stood high and the other had deteriorated in dignity.

'I was sent by my father to convoy the Prince to Kemsale,' said the young man, 'where they will have been awaiting him these two hours past. It was Lord Beechmont who suggested this throwing of dice after dinner. I think it may serve your turn, if you will wait awhile.'

The Merchant's face grew dark again. 'So that was my Lord Beechmont!' he exclaimed, 'whose family is also allied to mine, but who could do nothing but sneer at my condition of citizen. As for serving my turn, my lord, I promise you that it shall serve the turn neither of the Prince nor my brother. When they get back to London they shall find the town ringing with the story.'

'They will dread that,' said the young man, with a clear laugh. 'Do you wait in this room, Mr Clinton, and let me go back and deal with the matter on your behalf.'

He was full of life and energy, and seemed to enjoy the idea of having his finger in the pie. He opened the door of a room brightly lit up, but unoccupied, and with a quick friendly glance and smile at Thomas, went back to the dining-room.

The room which they entered was that which the Merchant's mother had chiefly used, in the happy days of his childhood. It was full of little things that reminded him of her—the spinet open which she had played for her children to sing to, her embroidery frame, her books and materials for writing, the chair and the sofa upon which she had sat. On the walls were many drawings and miniatures of her family, besides older pictures of greater value. All these things his brother—a portrait of whom as a child hung in a place of honour—had sold.

He could hardly hold himself in patience, and came near to choking as his eye fell first upon one thing and then upon another that brought back memories. 'He shall not do it,' he cried, with his hands clenched.

'I think he will not do it,' said Thomas. 'I have great faith in Lord Kemsale.'

'He is kin to us,' said his father, 'though he may not know it. We have come low in the world, and never lower than now, when the head of our house thinks himself so highly distinguished.' He swore a round oath at the Beau. 'Why did I come before the Prince as a suitor?' he said angrily. 'His word might have been given to stop this robbery, and he has not given it. He has shown offence instead.'

'We need care little enough for that,' said Thomas. 'Neither you nor I would care to take the road that leads to his favour.'

'I do not care for it,' said the Merchant. 'Much more offence will be shown when I publish my story. And I care not for that either.'

In a short time Lord Kemsale came back. He looked both triumphant and amused. 'It has gone our way,' he said. 'Come, Mr Clinton. If I might advise,' he added, turning to Thomas, 'you had better stay here. We shall see each other again, I hope—often.'

The Merchant followed him into the dining-room. The company was seated, and had something of the air of a judicial assembly, with the Prince at its head. There were no signs of the dice-box. The Beau sat in the same careless attitude as before, but he looked sulky. He did not turn his head as his brother came into the room.

'Mr Clinton,' said the Prince, leaning forward a little, 'you seem to have entirely misunderstood the little pleasantry in which we were engaged when you came upon us. It is now at an end, and in consideration of the disturbance of mind you were undergoing, I overlook the somewhat unusual manner in which you behaved in my presence.'

The Merchant's anger had not cooled during his wait, but he controlled himself sufficiently to bow and say nothing.

'Your brother,' said the Prince with a smile, 'is one of my oldest and most intimate friends; but I am not altogether blind to his little failings. It would distress me to feel that the hospitality he has offered me has been purchased at the expense of his family, in the way you have brought to my notice. He has consented, at my solicitation, to accede to the request that I understand you have already made of him, and he has so far refused to consider. He will make over his property here to you; the details you can settle between you. But when we leave this house, as we must do now, immediately, we will leave you in undisputed possession. May you live long to enjoy it, and be a better Squire of Kencote than your brother, who is something of a town-lover, has ever been!'

The Merchant's angry thoughts were shot through with a pure streak of joy. That he would have to pay heavily for succeeding before his time, was nothing. He would willingly do that.

The Prince had turned towards the Beau, and was laughing at him. The Beau rose slowly to his feet,

'I think it is time we were setting forth,' he said languidly. 'This house is distasteful to me, and I want to get away from it as quickly as possible.'

There was a general laugh, as the Prince also rose to his feet, and the rest of the company with him.

The Merchant stood aside. The Prince bowed to him as he went out of the room, with a somewhat distant air. Although he had brought about the most desirable solution of the difficulties of so many years, and had played his part handsomely at the end, the Merchant understood that, as the new Clinton of Kencote, he must be content to remain outside the circle of the royal favour. He smiled inwardly at the thought.

Some of the Prince's followers bowed ironically to him, his brother passed him without a look or a word. Young Lord Kemsale went last out of the room. He took the Merchant's hand and shook it warmly. 'I frightened them,' he said, with a laugh. 'But you might have been Earl of Kencote by-and-by, Mr Clinton.'

The Merchant slept that night in a room in his brother's rectory. Before he went to bed, he leaned out of the window and drew into his nostrils the mild autumn air, sweet with blowing over the woods and fields of the peaceful country. After the rattle of the town, to which he had been used for so many years, the stillness was almost palpable. But he was blissfully in tune with it. His city life dropped from him. He had thrown himself into it and enjoyed it for forty years, and more, but he knew now that it had been nothing but a leading up to this. He was sprung from generations who had lived in this quiet happy corner of the country, and loved it from the bottom of their hearts. What did he want with an earldom? He had Kencote now, which he loved no less than any of them, and money enough to restore it to himself. The bad days for Kencote were over. He was no longer the Merchant; he was the Squire.

‘IN THAT STATE OF LIFE’

I

LORD KIMMERIDGE came through the garden door, and looked about him.

It was twelve o'clock on a fine June morning, and at twelve o'clock on any morning, fine or not, he was generally at work in his laboratory. He wished himself there now; he was engaged in experiments of absorbing interest, and counted all time wasted that was not devoted to them. Scientific investigation was Lord Kimmeridge's passion, and considering his age, which was no more than thirty, he had won for himself considerable fame, as the owner of an original and daring mind, and a man who was likely to go far.

Peering with short-sighted eyes over such of the beautiful garden of Steynes Park as was visible from where he stood, and not finding what he was looking for, he took the path that ran along by the house, and gave only one small sigh at the thought of what lay before him.

He made his way through a gateway in an old brick wall, and found himself in another garden; but what he was looking for was not there either, so he went on, between the espaliered apple-trees and the borders of irises, to another archway in yet another brick wall.

It was not often that he was called upon to sacrifice any of the valuable morning hours to duties that lay outside his chosen work. His mother took nearly all such duties off his hands—she and Mr Brydon, the

agent, and Mr Clark, the Rector. He had been allowed to go his own way since very early days.

He had succeeded to his title at the age of fourteen, during his first year at Eton, where he had already begun to strike out a line of his own. He had been an unmitigated 'scug' at school. He had thought about nothing but work, and had not been made quite so happy as he might have been as a lower boy. But he had ended by being very well liked. Character tells, even in a society so exacting of orthodox tastes and pursuits as that of a public school; and because he had never faltered in a single one of the tastes and pursuits that he followed on his own account, he had at last been left in peace, as a harmless but amiable crank with something up his sleeve for the future.

All his forbears who had gone on to a university had been at Oxford. He expressed a wish to go to Manchester, or to a German university, but compromised on Cambridge, where he found himself happy, took all the honours available in his branches of study, and began to make his reputation in the scientific world. After that, he made the best of his peculiar circumstances, fitted himself up a laboratory at Steynes Park, and, except for occasional journeys to various seats of learning at home and abroad, had remained there ever since.

He had no brothers or sisters; but a little girl who had lost her mother—a cousin of Lady Kimmeridge's—spent much of her time at Steynes Park. Her name was Angela Luttrell, and she was about nine years younger than Kimmeridge.

It was she whom he was looking for now. His mother had told him that she was somewhere in the garden. She had also suggested that he should ask her to marry him; and he was going to do so.

In a corner of the second brick-walled garden was

a glass-house in which he was carrying out certain plant-fertilising experiments. As Angela was not anywhere in sight, he went into this house just for one peep, and remained there for about a quarter of an hour, deeply interested. At the end of that time he came out again, and continued his search. He was extremely conscientious, and when a duty had to be done he lost as little time as possible in getting it over.

He found her at last sitting by the lily pool, with a book. If he had ever thought about such things at all, he would have thought now what a very pretty picture she would have made, in her soft white frock and her big hat. And when he got nearer to her, in spite of his short sight, he might, without any disloyalty to whatever goddess watches over the investigations of an ardent biologist, have admired unreservedly a face and figure of which no goddess imagined by man in the springtime of the world need have been ashamed. But he only saw a girl whom he liked as well as any girl—if he could be said to like any girls at all—a distant cousin, whose distance he was ready, if she should wish it, to reduce by all the degrees that lay between them.

She looked up and smiled at him. 'Henry!' she exclaimed, 'Whatever are you doing out of doors at this time of the morning?'

He sat down on the seat on which she was sitting—at the other end of it—crossed his knees, and put his hand on the back of the bench, but not with any idea of reaching her with it.

'My dear Angela,' he said, 'I have come to find you. I have a proposal to make to you.'

She looked away suddenly, and the pink of her cheek deepened to rose. Then she looked up at him, and smiled again.

'Yes?' she said.

He took off his glasses, wiped them, and put them on

again. 'My mother thinks it is time I thought of being married,' he said; 'and I quite agree with her that if it is to be done at all it had better be done at once.'

'Yes, Henry?' she said again.

He paused for a moment. He was very conscientious. He wanted to do the thing well, but he had so little experience to go upon.

'Well, will you?' he asked.

'Will I what, Henry?'

'Will you marry me, Angela?'

'Thank you very much, Henry; but I think not.'

'Oh!'

There was another short pause. What did one do at this point?

'My mother quite thought you would,' he said. 'At least, she gave me that impression. I quite understood from her that she thought you would.'

Another pause.

'You say no, definitely, Angela?'

'I say no, definitely, Henry.'

'Oh!'

He seemed a little surprised—not disturbed at all—a little puzzled as to what to say next.

She came to his rescue. She looked into his plain but not unattractive face, with its firm mouth and high white forehead, from which the hair was beginning to recede, and smiled again.

'You don't want to marry me very much, do you, Henry?' she asked.

'My dear Angela,' he said, 'it is not a question of what I want. My mother has pointed out to me that in my position, as the head of a respectable family, and the owner of landed property, with no one to succeed me, it is my duty to marry; and I am quite ready to do my duty.'

'Is that all, Henry? It is only a matter of duty?'

'A pleasant duty,' he said courteously, looking at her with a smile that made his face almost handsome. 'Most of the duties connected with my position as a landowner are not so pleasant. I wish I could get rid of them altogether. Still, there they are; and they must be taken into account.'

He discoursed for some little time on the distractions to scientific work brought about by the peculiar position in which he was situated, and gave her to understand that if she could see her way to reconsidering her decision he should feel much relieved, and could afterwards take up his work with the prospect of continuing it uninterrupted for the rest of his life. He also told her handsomely that he had grown so used to her presence at Steynes Park that whenever she was away he missed her, and that his mother felt the same, perhaps even more strongly. This was the nearest he got to a declaration of personal interest in her.

She listened to him without interruption, always with the smile on her face, affectionate and mocking at the same time. When he had quite finished, she said, 'Well, thank you very much indeed, Henry; but I am afraid I cannot marry you.'

She said it with an air of decision that put an end to his very slight pressure of her. He gave a little sigh, and said, 'Well, I should have liked it if it had been possible.' Then he looked at his watch, and said, 'If you have quite made up your mind, I won't take up any more of your time, Angela. I will get back to my work. There is a clear hour before luncheon.'

He rose and stood before her. She looked up at him, and said, 'You don't mind my saying 'no' very much, do you, Henry?'

'Not *very* much, my dear,' he said, with that regard for strict truth that characterised him. 'Still, I would rather you had said 'yes.'

With that he left her, and she looked after him as he walked quickly away across the grass, with the student's stoop already fixed in his bearing. Her smile still lingered, but it had lost its mocking quality, and now only held affection, and perhaps a little regret.

II

THE three of them met at the luncheon table.

Lady Kimmeridge was there first. She never waited for her son, and she never sent to remind him that a meal was ready. It would be difficult to rate too highly this almost daily act of self-suppression; for she hated unpunctuality and disorder of all kinds.

Angela was almost as invariably punctual as she was; and because she was late to-day Lady Kimmeridge quite thought that she was with her son. They came in together, having met by chance in the hall, and they were talking so unconstrainedly that, after one searching glance at them, she allowed herself to believe that what she had so long desired had at last come to pass, and showed her pleasure so plainly—to Angela—that the girl ran away directly luncheon was over.

Kimmeridge sat on for a few minutes, smoking a cigarette, and talking about the work on which he was engaged. Lady Kimmeridge always encouraged him to talk about his work. She had no temperamental leanings towards science, but she was a clever woman, and quite capable, after ten years or so of practice, of saying the things necessary to indicate that she was interested in his pursuits.

But now, as he talked on, oblivious of her state of expectation, she eyed him impatiently. Angela's running away directly the servants had left the room

had struck at her confidence. What could have happened? She could wait to know no longer.

'Henry,' she said, interrupting him. 'I hope you took my advice.'

He looked at her blankly. She had to say plainly, 'Did you speak to Angela?' before he called to mind the occurrence of the morning.

Even then he looked puzzled for a moment, as if he could not quite remember what the conversation had been about. 'Oh, you mean about her marrying me, mother. Yes, I did. Yes, certainly I did. She refused me. I regret to say that she refused me.'

Poor Lady Kimmeridge looked sadly crestfallen. She saw at once how it had been, and once again she put strong control over herself.

She had had to do it so often. She knew so well what it was to take every possible pains to lead him up to a point, and to spare him all trouble in the first difficult steps, and then, when it rested with him to take the one little one that she could not take for him, to have all her carefully laid plans brought to naught.

Well, he was like that. Nothing she could do or say would alter him. So she did and said nothing on such occasions, but began all her work over again. She was a woman whose wisdom and self-control amounted almost to inspiration.

She let him go now without a word of reproach. All she said was, 'I am sorry, Henry. We must think out a plan.'

'Oh, yes, mother,' he said, rising from the table. 'I quite agree with you; now you have opened my eyes to my responsibilities, I quite agree with you that I ought to get married. We will think out a plan, as you say.'

Then he left her, and forgot all about it by the time he had reached the other side of the door.

Angela left Steynes Park a few days later. Now that she was grown up, she sometimes joined her father in his incessant wanderings. She was his only child, and a considerable heiress. Lady Kimmeridge never said good-bye to her without an uncomfortable premonition of disaster. It was not within reason that a girl so charming, and so matrimonially desirable, should remain single much longer. This time, as she fondly kissed her farewell, she felt as if she must surely be losing her altogether.

And yet, there was a glimpse of hope. Angela had said nothing to her of what had happened that morning in the garden, but she could not divest her mind of a suspicion that their ultimate desires were the same. Otherwise, why should Angela have gone away at all? She had come with the idea of staying through the summer. No doubt she felt that the situation was awkward for her; but Kimmeridge did nothing to make it awkward. He had apparently forgotten all about the proposal, and was the same as always towards Angela, evidently liking to have her there when he emerged from his scientific absorption, and exhibiting not the smallest sign of diffidence before her. Lady Kimmeridge felt that if Angela had taken the affair as lightly as he had, she would have stayed on.

But she had fled. Therefore she did not take it lightly.

III

LADY KIMMERIDGE was used to entertaining scientists at Steynes Park. She had played hostess to all sorts, old and young, famous or obscure. Sometimes they stayed for one night, sometimes for weeks together; sometimes they came singly, sometimes in batches.

Some were easy to entertain, some were difficult, some were impossible.

But among all the varieties of scientists of whom she had had experience, it so happened that she had never hitherto been asked to receive one of her own sex, although she knew that such existed.

Kimmeridge told her one morning that Dr Margaret Platter was coming to stay for a week or two, to help him with certain experiments. In answer to her inquiries, he said that he had corresponded with her frequently, and met her once. She had an extraordinary grasp—for a woman. He supposed she was what might be called young. Yes; now he was asked the question, she certainly was not old. A lady? Oh, yes, certainly a lady. He did not suppose she would want much looking after, when they were not at work together. They had experiments to make that would keep them pretty well occupied. If he were his mother he should not worry about her at all—just leave her to go her own way.

Dr Margaret Platter came, and Lady Kimmeridge felt a sense of relief on the first sight of her. She was not at all impossible! She was a large, rather handsome young woman, with a grave, sensible face, quiet-mannered, quietly dressed, self-assured, but not eager to push into intimacy. Her well-developed brain was more in evidence than her well-developed body, and the scientific studies with which it seemed to be chiefly occupied did not engross it to the exclusion of other interests. She and Kimmeridge talked together during the dinner that followed her arrival, and of course about science. But she also talked to Lady Kimmeridge upon other subjects, and showed herself a woman of wide reading, who had ideas about literature, and about art, and, indeed, about most things that were going on in the world.

Lady Kimmeridge enjoyed her conversation more than she usually enjoyed that of her son's fellow-workers. But she did not like Dr Margaret Platter.

She could hardly have told why. It was not because she spoke with a very slight Cockney accent, and was not quite of the class that Lady Kimmeridge had had in her mind when she had asked if she were a lady. She would not have quarrelled with any one who had chosen to call her so; class had nothing to do with it. She would always have preferred the society of an intelligent woman with no claims to birth to that of one of her own rank with few claims to intelligence; and in any case, no objection could have been brought either against Dr Margaret Platter's manners or her appearance.

In another respect also, she was beyond reproach. She never once showed herself unpleasantly conscious of the rank of her host and hostess, and this had not always been the case with men of learning invited to Steynes Park. She was there for a definite purpose, and she never seemed to forget what that purpose was.

In fact, Lady Kimmeridge could find no fault with her at all; and yet she did not like her.

But Kimmeridge did. He judged her, of course, entirely by her brain, which was the only thing he ever judged anybody by; and about the quality of her brain there could be no two opinions. His work progressed, with her to help him, as it had never progressed before, and on the afternoon of the third day of their labours together his appreciation of her brought him to the point of a proposal of marriage.

It was done quite on the spur of the moment. They had been absorbed in their work for hours, and were standing at one of the windows of the laboratory, discussing what they had done, and making plans for the morrow. Kimmeridge was in a pleasurable state of

excitement, and Dr Margaret Platter was pleased too, although she expressed her pleasure less freely. It struck him that nothing ought to stand in the way of their working together continuously; and, as his brain always moved at lightning speed, it struck him the next moment that marriage would provide the desirable tie, and that his mother wanted him to get married.

So he said at once: 'Miss Platter, no man and woman have ever had so much in common as you and I. Will you do me the honour of becoming my wife?'

Naturally, she was startled. She lost colour and gained colour, and had for the moment nothing to say.

'It strikes me,' said Kimmeridge, warming to the idea, now that it had once found entrance into his brain, 'that it would be an admirable arrangement. If you agreed, I should propose that we should get married immediately, with as little fuss as possible, and settle down to carry out those experiments of which we have been talking. They will keep us busy for months, perhaps for years; and we should enjoy ourselves immensely. How does it strike you?'

She was already mistress of herself again. Kimmeridge had been looking into her face all the time he had been speaking, but he had seen nothing of her momentary confusion. He felt none himself, Angela had shown none when he had put the question to her, and he expected none from a woman so eminently sensible as Dr Margaret Platter.

So when she answered him in a level voice: 'Thank you, Lord Kimmeridge, I will think it over,' he felt that matters were progressing favourably. Of course, she must have time to think it over. That was only reasonable. But the proposal was so evidently a suitable one that it was unlikely she would see it in any other light.

'There's no hurry,' he said kindly; 'no hurry at all.

Perhaps you would like to talk it over with my mother. She will be delighted at the idea, and these things are perhaps more for women to settle between themselves than for men.

There was the hint of a smile about the corners of Dr Margaret Platter's firm mouth. She was not likely to make the mistake of thinking that Lady Kimmeridge would be delighted with the idea. She said: 'I think I would rather you did not say anything to her, or to anybody, until I have given you my answer.'

'Oh, certainly,' he said. 'I will do exactly what you wish in the matter. And don't let it worry you at all. If you would rather not, tell me so frankly, and I will not bother you any further. We will just go on with our work, and think no more about it. But I can't help hoping that you will consent. It would be such a splendid arrangement all round.'

Dr Margaret Platter went straight to her room to dress for dinner; but there was plenty of time, and she did not begin her toilet operations at once. She looked round the large comfortable room, which contained furniture that had been in the house for perhaps a hundred years, and whose walls were hung with drawings and prints of some value. Everything in it spoke of an old-established opulence which was far from being connected in any way with the work to which she had devoted herself, and to which the owner of this room and the other handsome rooms of this fine house also devoted himself. Then she went to the window, and looked out over the beautiful gardens and the park beyond them.

There was a new expression on her face. The scientific investigations of which her mind had been so full when she had first been introduced to this room were probably as far from it at that moment as they very well could be. Her face was thoughtful, and if

Lady Kimmeridge had seen it at that moment she would have liked it less than ever, although its expression might have meant no more than that she had awoke to a realisation of what most young women of a marriageable age and considerable personal attractions might have had in their minds from the first.

She dressed herself with more than usual care, and went down to dinner.

IV

WHEN Dr Margaret Platter went into the laboratory the next morning, Lord Kimmeridge greeted her with an eager smile.

‘Always punctual!’ he said, rubbing his hands with pleasure at the prospect of the fascinating work before them. ‘Now let’s begin.’

She stood before him on the bare floor, calm and stately. ‘Lord Kimmeridge,’ she said, ‘I accept the offer you made to me yesterday evening.’

‘I beg your pardon?’ he said. ‘Oh! That! Yes! Well, I needn’t say how pleased I am. I hoped you would. I quite hoped you would. It is very satisfactory. We’ll talk it over later—when we’re not so busy, eh?’ Another smile at her. ‘Now we’ll begin, shall we?’

They began; and went on for three hours without intermission. It is quite certain that during that time Kimmeridge never gave it a thought that he had proposed marriage to his assistant, and that she had accepted him. It is also certain that Dr Margaret Platter gave it a great many thoughts. She had unusual powers of concentration, and used them now doggedly. But the fine edge of her scientific enthusiasm was blunted, and when the gong warned for the hour of

luncheon, and they began to prepare to leave their work for a time, Kimmeridge was conscious of a sense of disappointment at the way things had gone.

He looked at her with a hint of reproach. 'You are not *quite* so keen as you were?' he suggested. 'But I think we are on the right lines.'

A flicker of the eyelids, too quick for him to discern, indicated a temper under that calm exterior. 'I am as keen as ever I was,' she said; and I am *sure* we are on the right lines.'

'Oh, well, I dare say it will go better this afternoon,' he said indulgently. 'But if you are tired, perhaps you would like an afternoon off.'

'I am not tired,' she said, and waited for him to say more.

Then he remembered; and it could not have been pleasant for her to see a shadow come over his face. But she understood it very well. Something would have to be done which would interrupt what he wished to give all his attention to.

'We will tell my mother what we have settled,' he said, smiling at her once more. 'She will be very pleased.'

He told her when the servants had brought in the coffee, and left them to themselves; and she was not at all pleased. She was startled out of all her hard-won equanimity at the statement thrown at her across the table.

'Mother, this clever young person has consented to marry me. We are going to work together for the rest of our lives.'

The eyes of the two women clashed like swords for an instant, and then disengaged. But Lady Kimmeridge said as plainly as if she had spoken: 'You've entrapped him;' and Dr Margaret Platter told her as plainly that she was going to fight for what she had won.

Lady Kimmeridge said, in a voice that trembled a little: 'That is a serious step to take, Henry, on such a very short acquaintance;' and when she had spoken had recovered her self-control.

'We feel as if we had known each other for a hundred years, don't we?' said Kimmeridge to his fiancée.

She replied gravely: 'We are both of an age to know what we want. Our interests in life are the same; we ought to gain as much happiness as most people.'

No doubt *she* knew what she wanted, was Lady Kimmeridge's unspoken comment on this straightforward speech; and there began to grow up in her mind a determination that she should not have what she wanted, if it could possibly be prevented.

Dr Margaret Platter did not shirk the discussion that was bound to come. She invited it, by following Lady Kimmeridge into her morning-room.

Lady Kimmeridge turned towards her when the door had been closed. There was trouble in her eyes, as well as some indignation.

'Do you love my son?' she asked.

'As much as he loves me,' was the uncompromising reply, delivered in a firm voice, and with a calm, critical gaze.

Lady Kimmeridge turned away and took a chair, leaving her opponent to do the same if she pleased.

She did please, but she did not speak.

'Do you think it is right for a woman to marry a man she does not love?'

Dr Margaret Platter had no surface vulgarities, or she might have treated the second question as a variant of the first, and met it by another still. 'I think,' she said, 'that it is right for every woman to take what chances are offered her, whether in marriage or anything else. I have thought very little of marriage. I have been too busy, and my work has been enough for

me. But I have always expected to marry some day, and I could hardly have hoped for a better lot than to be offered marriage by a man whose tastes and ambitions are exactly the same as mine.'

'Even when that man is acting on an impulse that makes an offer of marriage almost an affront?'

Dr Margaret Platter's eye dropped for an instant, but she answered composedly: 'I cannot see it in that light, Lady Kimmeridge.'

'I think you can, Miss Platter. I think any woman could.'

Lady Kimmeridge had won the first round. Her opponent now took up an attitude which enabled her to win the second.

'What is it you object to in me as a wife for your son?' she asked.

'To what you show of yourself to me, by accepting at once an offer so lightly made.'

It was not the answer she had expected, and she replied to it hurriedly: 'I did not accept at once. Lord Kimmeridge asked me yesterday, and I did not give him his answer until this morning.'

'You thought it over. Will you tell me what decided you?'

'I have already told you, Lady Kimmeridge.'

'Have you told me everything?'

Dr Margaret Platter had the mental honesty and directness of the scientist. 'You would not believe me,' she said, 'if I told you that I was not influenced by Lord Kimmeridge's position, which, I suppose, is what you want me to admit. But whether you believe me or not, his character and his pursuits weighed with me more heavily than that.'

'Are you sure that is so? Have you had no offers of marriage from men whose character you knew better than you do his, and whose pursuits are the same?'

If Dr Margaret Platter had been able to answer no, she would have won that round. But her eyes unwillingly fell once more, and she made no reply.

'I think you are deceiving yourself,' said Lady Kimmeridge quietly.

Then Dr Margaret Platter made a mistake. She raised her clear eyes, and asked: 'Are you not showing, when you press that point, that your real objection to me is that my position in the world is not equal to yours.'

'And if that were my objection, what then?'

'You think that that should count against community of interests, and against the fact—you will excuse very plain speech—that I am not conspicuously lacking in appearance, or youth, or manners, I hope, or intelligence?'

'It would count far less with me than you might think; it would not count with my son at all. How much does it count with you?'

Again the eyes dropped.

'For what reason,' pursued Lady Kimmeridge, 'did you accept a sudden offer—I know my son, and I know it must have been sudden, and must have taken you by surprise—after knowing him for less than three days? If you ask yourself that question you will find the answer to the one you asked me; why do I object to you as a wife for my son?'

Dr Margaret Platter rose deliberately from her chair. 'I am sorry that you do not like me,' she said. 'I shall hope to be able to remove your prejudice in time.'

It was a confession, and at the same time a denial, of defeat. The years of self-control that Lady Kimmeridge had practised stood her now in good stead. 'Am I to take it that you cling to your capture?' she asked, in a voice as quiet as before.

Dr Margaret Platter also had self-control. With only a catch of the breath, and cheeks brighter than their wont, she looked down at Lady Kimmeridge, and said calmly: 'I told you, Lady Kimmeridge, that I had taken the night to consider the question. I have given my word, and I shall keep that.'

V

'MOTHER, where is Angela? I thought she was going to be here most of the summer.'

Lady Kimmeridge did not immediately reply to this question, for fear that the keen delight with which she heard it should affect her voice. She drank some coffee before she said: 'She is in London. They were going abroad a fortnight ago, but Colonel Luttrell has altered his plans.'

'Couldn't you get her down here?' He turned towards Dr Margaret Platter, with his ever-courteous smile. 'Angela Luttrell is my cousin—a very distant cousin,' he said. 'She has lived with us a great deal ever since she was a child. I should like you to know her. She would be a companion for you during your off hours. I am afraid you must sometimes be dull.'

'I am never dull,' she said. 'But, of course, I should like to know Miss Luttrell.'

After breakfast, Kimmeridge sought out his mother, to press her to send for Angela. It was two days after his suit had been accepted. Lady Kimmeridge had said nothing to him upon the subject, and he had said nothing further to her. He had not noticed any difference in her attitude towards their guest, when the three of them were together, but he had noticed that during the hours spent away from work, if he did not keep his fiancée company nobody did.

'You seem to be so busy in these days, mother. If Angela were here, she and—and Margaret'—he never used her name without hesitation—'could amuse one another.'

'You are engaged to marry Margaret, Henry,' she said, using the name with no sign of hesitation. 'You should not want a third person to amuse her.'

His face clouded. 'We work together most of the day,' he said. 'It does us good to be apart for a time. When we are together we naturally talk about our work when we ought to be resting our brains.'

'When you are married, Henry, you will always be together.'

'Yes, but——. Well, you will be here, mother.'

'No, Henry. When you are married I shall leave Steynes.'

'What!' This was quite a new idea to him.

'Margaret will take my place,' she said. 'I shall live in London, I hope with Angela. When are you thinking of getting married, Henry?'

'But, mother, surely you are not going to desert me! What would Steynes do without you?'

'Margaret must take my place. She is your choice, Henry. You cannot have her and me, too.'

It came to his mind, as a dim idea, possibly to be examined later, that his mother did not like Margaret. He frowned again. 'Margaret and I will be very busy working together,' he said.

'I hope the work is going satisfactorily, Henry.'

'Well, no, it isn't,' he said. 'I wish we could get this marriage over and settle down to it. It gets in the way. It comes to my thoughts frequently, when I ought to be giving my whole attention to the work; and I expect it is the same with her, although she says it isn't so. And we began so extraordinarily well together. Mother, I don't like to think of you leaving

Steynes. I should like you and Angela to live here always. You seem to belong to the place. How would it be if I—if we—were to live in London, and you were to stay here?’

‘Have you suggested that to Margaret?’

‘No; but I could. I think she would be pleased. We could come here sometimes. You wouldn’t mind that?’

‘Oh, no, Henry.’

‘I like Steynes, you know—especially in the summer. I am sometimes glad to think it is mine. But it would be good for our work to live in London, especially now, at this stage.’

‘I would do whichever you wished. You had better talk it over with Margaret.’

He did so. She said, with that droop of the eyes which he never noticed, but Lady Kimmeridge always did, that she would be willing to live in London.

‘I think we ought to get married soon,’ he said. ‘Until we do, I’m afraid we shall never really be able to settle down to our work.’

Again the droop of the eyes. She had tried with all her powers to keep herself up to her work. ‘I have nothing to wait for,’ she said.

‘Then you would not mind being married at once—very quietly—let us say in a week from now. We could take up our work again immediately afterwards, and then, I am quite sure, with nothing to disturb our thoughts, we shall get on splendidly with it.’

He used his kind smile on her, the smile which, of all that she had to meet in these difficult days, brought her compunction. She could not return it. ‘I will think it over,’ she said.

He put the matter to his mother. He had made the plunge; let them get it over as soon as possible, and as quietly as possible. Let them walk out of the house

one morning, and come back to go on with their work—they two, with her and Angela. He should like Angela to be there; she seemed to belong to Steynes.

'My dear Henry,' she said, 'have you realised that Margaret has parents of her own—is one of a large family?'

'No, she has never mentioned it to me,' he said.

She could not forbear a laugh. 'Really, my dear boy,' she said, 'your entire detachment from all the actualities of life makes me wonder whether I have done right in sparing you so much. It cannot be the part of a wise man to exercise one side of his brain so much to the exclusion of every other.'

It was the nearest she had ever gone to criticism of him since his boyhood. 'Why, mother! What do you mean?' he asked in surprise.

'In this instance,' she said, more gravely, 'I mean that you appear to care so little for the woman you want to make your wife within a few days that you have not put a single question to her about herself.'

'Well,' he said, a little disconcerted, 'after all, it will be she and I; and our tastes are more closely allied than can possibly be the case with the great majority of married people. Her family will not matter to us.'

'I should think it is likely to matter to her. You, certainly, cannot judge of that, as you know nothing whatever about her outside your laboratory. At any rate, her parents matter to this extent, that you must be married from their house, and not from your own. You ought, of course, to go and see them.'

This disconcerted him more than ever. 'Do you really think so, mother?' he asked. 'She has never suggested it.'

'Don't you think she would expect the suggestion to come from you?'

'Would she? I know so little of these things. I

shouldn't like to fail in courtesy. I will do it, if it has to be done. But dear me, what a deal of fuss there seems to be about such a simple thing as a marriage between two sensible people. It is annoying too, at the present moment. I do not want to have to break off to go to London now.'

She paused before asking: 'Would you like Mr and Mrs Platter asked to come here instead?'

He jumped eagerly at the idea.

VI

It was assuredly no matter for shame that a young woman who, in personal appearance, manners and deportment, needed to fear no comparison with the well-born, and in intelligence and achievement stood vastly higher than the average, should have raised herself to such an eminence entirely by her own exertions. And yet Dr Margaret Platter would gladly have exchanged a good few of her attainments for an origin some degrees higher in the social scale, when the visit of her parents to Steynes Park was mooted to her.

Her father was an assistant in the shop of a second-hand furniture dealer, a wiry man of necessarily grubby exterior, but with an eager delight in such knowledge as a busy life and a meagre equipment of education had permitted him to acquire. Her mother was what is known as a comfortable woman. She had no thirst for knowledge, but liked to see everybody happy around her. Her other outstanding quality was a capacity for economical management that had resulted in every one of her numerous family bettering the position in which she had brought them up. The eldest son was an electrical engineer, the second a solicitor's clerk,

the third a mining engineer, now in America, the fourth a schoolmaster. Of her daughters, one was married to a manager of motor-works, another to a Nonconformist minister, the third was a hospital nurse, engaged to a doctor, and the fourth was a doctor herself, the most brilliant of the whole keenly competent family. They were all very proud of Margaret, as well they might be; and she had always told herself that, however high she might rise in the world—and she meant to rise very high indeed—she would never be anything but proud of them in her turn.

But the sudden dizzying lift to a state not, perhaps, in comparison higher than any which she had thought of as within her reach, but certainly to a peak outside the range on which she had set her steadfast gaze, overthrew the adjustments she had constantly made between personal ambition and family loyalty. She could not keep back a blush, as well as the tell-tale droop of the eyes, when Lady Kimmeridge told her over the luncheon-table that she wished to invite Mr and Mrs Platter to Steynes Park.

It may surely be accounted to her for righteousness that she instantly raised her eyes, and said: ‘My father and mother are not used to visiting at such houses as this. I do not think they would wish to come, or would be comfortable here.’

Lady Kimmeridge was as capable of admiring courage as any woman, and but for her contempt for the unscrupulous designs of this young person, and her carefully concealed but none the less consuming anger against her, would have regretted putting her to such a test in the presence of the servants. Her regret, however, only embraced the impossibility of following up the revelation made by her enemy at that moment. When the time came, Dr Margaret Platter would be invited to expand her disclaimer on behalf of her parents

into one on behalf of herself, and she would probably not like doing so.

Lady Kimmeridge said nothing, but that socially unsophisticated scientist, her son, said at once, with his agreeable smile: 'Oh, but we shall do our best to make them feel at home. You must try to persuade them.'

Her large placidity enabled her to ignore this speech and go on with her luncheon until the servants had left the room, when she said: 'My father is in a very humble position. He and my mother have acted splendidly towards my brothers and sisters and myself, and have helped us all to make use of every possible educational advantage. But they would not be at home here, and it would be putting them in an invidious position to ask them. I am much obliged for your kindness all the same.'

The last sentence was addressed to Lady Kimmeridge, and accompanied by a clear look which said: 'I know what you are up to, and I will meet your guile by concealing nothing.'

Lady Kimmeridge understood the look perfectly, and accepted the challenge. 'Then do you propose to drop your parents out of your life entirely?' she asked.

'No,' said Dr Margaret Platter. 'But I do not propose to bring them into Henry's life.'

It was the first time that she had called him by his Christian name, and he looked rather surprised, as if it were one that was strange to him.

'I shall always be pleased to see them,' he said rather lamely. He did not in the least realise what was indicated by the phrase 'a very humble position,' and thought that Margaret perhaps, did not 'get on' with her parents. Nor had Lady Kimmeridge gauged the social gulf which this remarkable young woman had already bridged for herself. It did not even now occur to her that she had sprung from the ranks of

those who work with their hands and not with their brains.

For the moment she was at a disadvantage with her adversary, who had faced the complication from the first and laid down the lines upon which she would meet it. It was what had chiefly occupied her during the hours she had asked for reflection, and the decision had not been so much of a foregone conclusion as Lady Kimmeridge had supposed.

She turned her clear eyes upon Kimmeridge. 'I have already made up my mind about my family,' she said. 'I shall hope to go and see them sometimes; and those of them who have lifted themselves out of the position in which they were born, as I have myself, can come to see me sometimes, if you do not object. Neither I nor they will wish for more than that.'

This was all that was said at the moment. Kimmeridge, of course, accepted her decision, but without attempting to understand it. It added to the discomfort which seemed to be gathering all about him, over an arrangement which he had thought would finally relieve him of all discomfort concerning mundane affairs. His mother saw the cloud gathering, and held her peace.

VII

WITH whatever feelings Angela Luttrell had received the news of her cousin's engagement, she allowed none of them to appear when she arrived at Steynes Park a few days later. 'Dear Henry, I hope you will be very happy,' was all she said in reply to his welcoming speech, which had included the announcement: 'You have come just in time to see me married, Angela. I expect mother has told you about it.'

If she had come just in time to see him married, it

was none the less a fact that nothing further had been said as to when and where and how the marriage ceremony was to take place. Perhaps, as he had always been relieved of the burden of affairs having to do with the mechanism of life, he may have supposed that this affair was being arranged for him, and he would be given his part all in good time. Margaret Platter had waited some days for a further word from him, and was only now beginning to realise that the word would probably not come until she did or said something to invite it. Truly her path was one of thorns, and it was not made easier by the arrival of Angela Luttrell, concerning whom there were some mental adjustments to be made.

Lady Kimmeridge had never given her so much as a hint that she desired a marriage between Angela and her son, but she knew it as surely as if it had been cried aloud to her. And she knew as surely that Angela had been sent for as a reinforcement against her. Her difficult task was to discover how the reinforcement was intended to be used, and how far the girl herself would actively abet the designs of the enemy.

After a couple of days she had to confess herself baffled. Angela behaved exactly as a daughter of the house, and, while her intercourse with her cousin was entirely frank, and even affectionate, when all four of them were together, so far from seeking his society, she seemed to avoid it. Nor, beyond withholding all intimacy, did she show any feeling against Dr Margaret Platter herself. At meal-times, and on other occasions of their meeting, she seemed to exert herself to ease the wheels of intercourse; and she succeeded. If she had been brought to the house to diminish the constraint that Margaret Platter could not help feeling in the presence of her hostess, she could not have served her better. But she did not suppose that she had been

brought to the house with that purpose; nor did it seem likely that Lady Kimmeridge could have hoped anything from merely exhibiting her charm before her son, since he had had it before him for the greater part of his life.

Besides, there was no attempt to mark comparisons. Margaret Platter had at least expected that. She was clear-sighted about herself. She relied upon her intellect, her handsome presence, and her quiet trained manners; but she was well aware that there was something beyond, which this girl had and she had not, that would have brought her embarrassment, or at least reduced her to silence, if it had been insisted upon. It would have been quite possible for Lady Kimmeridge, without failing in any courtesy towards herself—or in none that she would have had a right to demand under the circumstances—to put her outside the circle, and to show her son that in the intimacy of his own relations her place must necessarily be outside it. But she had apparently rejected that weapon. Margaret Platter felt an increased respect for her on account of it; she fought cleanly.

But she fought. Why had she brought Angela to Steynes?

Her bewilderment would have been greater still if she had known that her name was never mentioned between Lady Kimmeridge and Angela. Each of them was wondering what the other was thinking, but neither would ask. Angela herself was in uncertainty as to why she had been so insistently begged to come to Steynes, without delay.

She may have had a glimmering of the reason when she did, at last, have a conversation alone with her cousin. It was true that she had taken some pains to avoid this ordeal. She knew him so well, and made such large allowances for his eccentricities, that she

was able to treat him with no diminution of cousinly goodwill when she met him supported by third and fourth parties. She also saw as clearly as it was possible for her to see how he stood with regard to Dr Margaret Platter. But she would hardly have been human, or feminine, if she had not felt some resentment against him for what he had done; and she would have preferred to spare herself the annoyance of hearing him talk about it. She could not avoid it, however, when he came towards her as she was sitting on the same garden seat on which he had made his proposal to her earlier in the summer; she could only string herself up to a determination not to lose the command over herself which enabled her to maintain her hitherto admirable attitude towards him.

He was not apparently troubled by any remembrance of what had already passed between them on the seat by the lily pond, but sat down in the same place and in the same way, with his arm stretched along the back of the bench, and said: 'I'm glad I've found you here, Angela. I've been so busy that I've seen very little of you since you came back. I want you to help me, if you will. I'm rather bothered about something.'

'I'm always ready to help you if I can, Henry,' she said quietly.

'Well, it's about this marriage of mine. I should naturally have spoken to mother; but for some reason or other she does not seem as pleased as I expected she would be about it, and I am not at all sure that she would help me if I did ask her.'

Angela had nothing to say to this remarkable speech, and he went on, after a short pause: 'I want to get it over as soon as possible. Until—er—Margaret and I are married, we cannot settle down properly to our work. I said about a week ago that I should like to be married soon, and with as little fuss as possible;

but as far as I can make out nothing has been done about it, and—and—well, I don't quite know what to do.'

It was fortunate for him that Angela had a sense of humour, or the interview might have been cut short at this point. She could not forbear laughing at him, but she did so in such a way that he smiled too, rather ruefully, and said :—

'What I should like would be a quiet wedding here—just we four, and—er—I suppose, Clarke.' Mr Clarke was the Rector of Steynes. 'Mother did say that we ought to be married from Margaret's home; but apparently she does not desire that. She has some reason for not wishing me to meet the members of her family.'

Angela's interest in this statement removed for the moment the pressure of other feelings. 'Why doesn't she wish it?' she asked.

'I have been trying to remember what she said. She gave a reason. I don't think they have quarrelled exactly. It had something to do with their position in life. But of course that wouldn't affect me in any way.'

She considered this thoughtfully. 'Well, how can I help you, Henry?' she asked.

'Well, you see, dear, I have been rather spoilt in having all annoyances of this sort taken off my shoulders. Mother has been so good about that, and leaving me to give myself to my work undisturbed. But I am pretty certain that she is not taking any steps to bring about this—this business, and I should not like to distress her in any way by asking her questions, or pressing her to move. So I thought—— Well, you know, Angela, you have been just as kind and good about saving me worries, and I wondered whether—whether *you* couldn't do something.'

She laughed again, as gently and agreeably as before. 'What does Miss Platter say about it?' she asked.

'Oh, I haven't said anything to her. I have felt that any suggestion ought to come first from our side.'

'And she has said nothing either?'

'Oh, no. She wouldn't, I suppose. It is all extraordinarily tiresome and worrying, Angela. We began so splendidly—with our investigations, I mean. Everything seemed to go exactly right; and it occurred to me that if we were always together, we might do some remarkable work, and both of us gain great satisfaction from it. So we should, I think, if we were once married. But it hangs on and hangs on, and the work is getting spoilt. I feel that; and I believe she feels it too, though she says she doesn't. Poor girl, I don't blame her. She has an extraordinary capacity, but I'm afraid it is not of much use to us just now. In fact, she seems to have lost it for the present—though I wouldn't hint at that to her.'

Angela was beginning to see a little daylight now. Henry was not the only person who wanted help from her, though no word had been said about help except by him.

'Well, I'm afraid if Cousin Helen doesn't see her way to take these troubles off your shoulders, Henry, I can't. But, surely, neither of us is any longer the person to expect that of.'

'You mean——'

'I mean that if you have chosen a woman for your wife, you ought to expect help of that sort from her.'

The statement seemed to affect him disagreeably. He sat for some time silent, and then said ingenuously: 'I hadn't thought of requiring of Margaret that she should do the things that mother, and you, do so well, and I can't do.'

She let this pass.

'I suppose I must take this upon my shoulders,' he said, after another pause. 'It seems to me that we

shall have to drop our work altogether until these tiresome affairs are settled. We are doing no good with it.'

They sat silent again for a time. The bees hummed in the hot, still air, the splash of a little fountain came gratefully to the ear. The sweet peaceful place made itself felt, even to him.

'We used to be so happy here at Steynes,' he said regretfully. 'I shall be sorry, after all, to leave it, though there will be compensations in London. I shall like to think of you and mother here, Angela. I wish we could all have stayed here together; but she says that is impossible. I don't know why; except that I'm afraid she doesn't care for Margaret. Well, I suppose I must talk to Margaret, and get something settled. Would you mind very much, Angela, if she were to discuss it with you, after I have spoken to her?'

'With me, Henry?'

'Yes. If mother doesn't care for her, it would be awkward for both of them, wouldn't it? You like her, don't you, Angela? You seem to get on well together. She likes you, I know.'

'Does she, Henry?'

'Yes. I told her how fond I was of you—how you had always lived here, and that the place wouldn't seem like itself without you. She said something—I forget what—which showed that she understood—and appreciated you.'

The girl laughed again—a full clear laugh, and then rose from her seat. Dr Margaret Platter was coming through the archway from the next garden.

VIII

KIMMERIDGE rose too, when he saw her. 'We have just been having a most serious talk,' he said, with his

benevolent smile; 'and now I want you two to have a talk.' A bright idea struck him. 'I'll leave you together,' he said. 'You will do it all much better without me.'

His hurried departure was so obviously a nervous flight, that Angela, in spite of herself, laughed again. But she resumed her seat. She would go through with it, for the sake of her dear friend, who seemed to expect something of her, though she had said nothing. And it would be rather interesting to herself, too, though not altogether free from hazard.

Margaret Platter, with a glance at her disappearing fiancé, took the seat that he had vacated, and said, in her slow, self-possessed way: 'I shall be glad to listen to anything you may have to say to me.'

'Henry is worried,' said Angela, after a short pause. 'He has been so used to having all his arrangements made for him by Cousin Helen, that he has almost lost the power of making any for himself.'

'Is he worried about the arrangements for our marriage?' asked Margaret Platter, coming at once to the point, as her way was.

'Yes. He has grasped the fact that in the ordinary way you would be married from your own home; but he says that you object to that, although he cannot remember why.'

This looked like mere 'cattiness.' Margaret Platter's face hardened as she said: 'You, at least, must know why. If he has forgotten what I said, Lady Kimmeridge hasn't.'

'But I am not Lady Kimmeridge, you see,' said the girl.

'Do you mean that Lady Kimmeridge has not told you what I said to her about my parentage?'

'She has never mentioned your name to me, except as that of some one staying in the house.'

This was a complete surprise, but it brought no relief. Silence seemed a strange weapon to fight with; but contemptuous silence, as this was, had power to wound.

'I am not ashamed of my parentage,' Dr Margaret Platter said, speaking more hurriedly than was her wont; 'but it is because of it that it is impossible for me to be married from my own home. What I told Lady Kimmeridge, and Henry, was that I had raised myself from a very humble position. My brothers and sisters have raised themselves too, but my parents remain what they were. I am very fond of them, but just as it has been impossible that they should share in the life I have lived for some years past, so it is impossible that they should share in the life I am going to live. They would admit it themselves. It is a matter between me and them.'

Angela's brain had been busy during this speech. She was trying to find a point on which to support herself. She knew that if Henry were to be brought out of this entanglement, it must be on the initiative of the woman who, in her view, had brought him into it. His mother must have seen that, already, and her wonderful silence must mean that she expected Angela to see it, and trusted her to act, in her own way, when the opportunity should come to her. It had come now; she would do what she could with it.

'Henry could hardly be expected to understand a feeling of that sort,' she said.

The words stung, though they had been spoken with no inflection of contempt. From one who had less command of herself than Margaret Platter they would have drawn something that would have provided an opening; but all she said was : 'I am not concerned to defend it. You, probably, would not understand me if I did. That sort of complication does not come into

your life. You are what you were born; I am what I have made myself.'

'It is a complication that has to be met, I suppose. As Henry wants me to discuss it with you, and you have said that you would be pleased to do so, I needn't apologise for saying that.'

'I didn't know what it was that he wanted you to discuss with me. It seems to me very extraordinary that you and I should be talking about these matters at all.'

'Why?' asked Angela, with an inward smile. Her father who had a military bee in his bonnet, and pressed it upon all who were willing to listen to him, and many who were not, had told her that one of the most effective weapons in argument was the judicious use of the questions 'Why?' or 'Why not?' But she had not thought that there would some day be profit to herself in the lesson.

Margaret Platter met the questions with another. 'Whatever arrangements have to be made about our marriage would hardly be made by you, would they?'

Angela resisted the temptation to ask, 'Why not?' and asked instead: 'Would you expect them to be made by Lady Kimmeridge? I told you that she had said nothing to me; but of course I know that she does not want Henry to marry you.'

'How do you know that, Miss Luttrell, if she has said nothing to you?'

'Is it really necessary for me to answer that question?'

Again the words were said quietly, and again they stung. Margaret Platter spoke quietly in return, but with a slight flush on her cheeks. 'Do you think that I am such an impossible wife for your cousin?' she asked. 'We have the same tastes; he said himself—and it is true—that there will be more in common between us than between most married people. He

thinks little of his birth and rank, compared with other things, and in those other things I am more his equal than almost any other woman you could find. Is it his happiness that Lady Kimmeridge wants, and you want—or what is it?'

'His happiness is all that either of us wants.' The opening had been taken. Angela only had to wait now for her opportunity. It came at once.

'Then how would you propose to secure his happiness, if he had asked you to marry him, instead of me? I ask without meaning offence. I want to know.'

'He did ask me to marry him.'

There was complete silence. Angela sat with her chin resting on her hand, looking out over the smooth lawn and the still water. Margaret Platter threw one look at her, and looked on the ground.

'He asked me two months ago,' said Angela, 'in this very place. I think he has forgotten it now.'

'You refused him, I suppose.' The words came awkwardly, as if something had to be said—it did not much matter what.

'The fact that he has forgotten it shows that I was right to refuse him. Also the fact that he asked you so soon afterwards. . . . I hope he won't forget that too.'

The last sentence, tacked on, apparently as an afterthought, was not in her plan; she was not of an age to use the strong self-control of Lady Kimmeridge. But it was a very effective sentence. Margaret Platter could only swallow the damaging indictment which it implied, but she did so with an anger that, however successfully she might hide it, reduced her powers as an antagonist.

'I think we are getting away from the point,' she said; and her voice was not quite steady. 'If you have a greater interest in Henry than I thought you had, I

shall be all the more ready to listen to you, if you will tell me what it is you want to say to me on his behalf.'

'You see, Cousin Helen and I have always done what we could to spare him all distractions from outside. He has been able to devote himself to his work, and enjoy his life away from it—a good deal more, I think, than he has had any real idea of. He loves Steynes—the house and the garden and the country round, and the people he has known all his life. He takes it all very quietly, but I don't believe he would be happy without it; and it is all a real recreation to him, as he is spared all the trouble in connection with such a place as this. Of course, it is odd, as you said just now, that he should come to me about the particular bother that is spoiling his contentment now; at least, it must seem odd to any one who knows him so little as you do. But he has always been used to come to me about little things, and about some bigger ones that he didn't want to go to Cousin Helen for; so I said I would help him if I could.'

'I think you are trying to put me in a false position, Miss Luttrell.' She was very angry now, and less mistress of herself than she had thought it possible she could be, under any circumstances. 'I won't be so vulgar as to say that you dislike me because your cousin has asked me to marry him so soon after he asked you. That may have something to do with it; but your real reason for disliking the idea of our marriage is that you don't think I am his social equal. Under all the circumstances, that seems to me a view that is only contemptible. He is far too big a man to feel it himself, and the cause of offence against me seems to be chiefly that I am willing to face it in order to keep away from him any difficulties that it might bring.'

This somewhat contradictory speech enshrined the same mistake as had given Lady Kimmeridge her

advantage. Angela was not less ready to take hers.

‘I don’t think social inequality would matter in the least,’ she said, ‘between two people who really loved one another.’

Margaret Platter bit her lip. She had delivered herself into her adversary’s hands.

Angela pressed her advantage relentlessly. ‘Whether the reason you have given for my disliking you is true or not, I shouldn’t think of denying that I am very fond of my cousin; and one can hardly be blamed for not liking some one who looks upon him as a person to use for a climb-up.’

‘Oh, but this is too much!’ Dr Margaret Platter rose to her full height, and glared down upon the girl, who still sat with her chin in her hand, looking out over the lawn and the water. ‘How dare you say such a thing to me?’

Angela sat back in her seat and looked up at her. ‘*I’m* not afraid of being vulgar,’ she said.

IX

WHATEVER this uncomfortable interview may have effected, it had done nothing to settle the point that Kimmeridge had wanted to have settled by it. It had, moreover, made it plain to Dr Margaret Platter that the point would have to be settled by her, if it were to be settled at all.

When she had walked away from the seat by the lily pond, with as much dignity as she could muster under the disagreeable consciousness of Angela’s eyes following her, it had been in her mind that she would settle it by giving up the game. The qualities which had brought her so far upon her upward road had included

a strong belief in her own integrity of purpose, and the fact that she had not been able to defend herself against the contempt that Angela had shown for the purpose she was embracing now very nearly opened her eyes to its virtual indefensibility.

But not quite. If it would be an impossible task to convince Angela, or Lady Kimmeridge, that it was not for his wealth and rank that she was going to marry Lord Kimmeridge, she was still able to convince herself. She would not deny that the wealth and rank counted, but what counted more was the large opportunities she would be given by such a marriage. Supposing Kimmeridge had gained his honours for the work he had done as a scientist, no one would have thought it anything but an admirable arrangement that he should marry one so closely allied to all his interests. Where was the difference? As for that question of love, which she had not been able to answer to Angela's satisfaction, it was not a matter to be discussed with a sentimental girl. She would bring quite as much in that respect as the other party to the contract, and both of them were satisfied with what would be brought.

On these points she could argue in her own favour, and had to do so if she were to keep her self-respect. On the other point—of her attitude towards her own family—she had no need to argue. She felt herself to be right, and was hot against those who would put her in the wrong. A man who had raised himself in the same way as she had, and wished to marry a woman of the status to which he had attained, would act in the same way, and nobody would blame him. Why should a woman be blamed? Her parents would not grudge the sacrifice on her behalf. They had already made similar sacrifices on a smaller scale, and even taken a pride in them. It was a matter between her and them, and it was not on their behalf that the hypocritical

censure had been offered. If any one would be pained by the necessity of keeping them aloof, it would be she; but she would do it as a concession to her husband's rank, partly even as a concession to the very relations who pretended to find something so shocking in it. Perhaps it was not easy for them to understand how little such adjustments were resented by people in the position of her parents, to whom payment in this coinage for the eagerly desired advancement of their children was foreseen and allowed for from the first. But they did not want to understand it; they wanted a weapon against her.

There was also in her mind the feminine disinclination to give up a capture to a rival. This girl had refused the offer made to her; but it was plain that she would accept it if it were renewed in a way that suited her. That side of the question, however, would not bear too close an examination. The implication that she herself had jumped at an offer which the girl had not been able to accept without loss of self-respect rankled more deeply than anything. It made her blush hotly to think of the way in which she had invited the statement, and the way in which it had been made.

The result of the passage at arms was that she was shaken, but not yet dislodged, from her purpose; but that was not its only result. She saw now that she ought to have acted on Kimmeridge's expressed wish for a prompt, and almost a secret, wedding. It was exactly what she wanted herself, and all her immediate difficulties would be solved by it in a way she could hardly have hoped for. It was true that she would have had to make all the arrangements for the wedding herself, since he was apparently incapable of bestirring himself even upon such a matter as that. It would have been somewhat humiliating, but hardly more so than to have waited on under the present circumstances

for somebody else to act, when there was nobody who would do so. And if she had taken the step they might have been man and wife by this time. She had no fears of what should come after; it was only this wretched little obstacle of the mere mechanism of marriage that stood in the way of what would be her triumph.

It was natural that her feelings towards the man whom she wished to marry should be tinged with irritation. She did full justice to his remarkable powers in a line in which she was as capable of estimating ability as anybody. She had the same sort of powers herself, but would have been ashamed if they had left her without any capacity to deal with affairs apart from those involved in scientific work. She could not believe that he was so helpless as he appeared to be. His womenfolk had spoilt him; it was like her father, who had always said that he was incapable of carving a joint, but carved it very well when her mother was not there to do it. She thought that at least he might be wound up to take the few steps that had to be taken, if she found out and told him what they were.

The prospect, however, of doing any thing at all seemed to cause him the deepest dismay, when she told him that she thought the simplest way would be for them to be married in London, at a Registry Office, and if he approved of that she would find out what formalities had to be gone through and let him know exactly what he would have to do to meet them.

'But that means all sorts of bothers,' he said, plaintively; 'and most likely I should have to go up to London beforehand, and I shouldn't know what to do when I got there.'

'I could find out for you exactly what would have to be done,' she said, fighting down her annoyance. 'It would not be so very difficult, especially for a man of your capacity.'

'Ah, my dear Margaret, my capacity is a very one-sided affair, as I am afraid you will find out. I don't quite like the idea of a Registry Office. Surely that isn't necessary, is it?'

'You would prefer to be married in a church?' She had hardly expected this weakness from an enlightened scientist.

'I think it would be more fitting. One has to consider one's position to a certain extent.'

It was the first time she had ever heard him refer to it, and did not understand that he was only repeating a learnt lesson. 'I think my mother would say that we ought to be married in a church,' he said.

'She doesn't seem to care about anything to do with it,' she replied, with a bitterness of feeling that was not entirely absent from her voice.

'I'm afraid not,' he said gravely. 'I wish it were otherwise. It was partly because——' He broke off. Even he saw that it would not gratify her to be told that it was partly to please his mother that he had asked her to marry him. 'She will not move in the matter, and I am so used, I'm afraid, to relying upon her, and Angela, for—— By the bye, you were to talk it over with Angela, weren't you? You haven't told me yet what passed between you. It wasn't *her* idea, was it—surely not—the registry office?'

How blundering and irritating he was, with all his kindness! She was stung into saying: 'Naturally, we didn't talk over such questions. I was surprised to learn that you had expected such a thing, when you ran away from us.'

He looked distressed. 'I'm afraid I'm a clumsy sort of person,' he said. 'But I've been so used to relying upon dear Angela, as well as upon my mother. I'm sorry if I offended you in any way. Of course I had no such intention. What *did* you talk about, then?'

The 'dear Angela' tried her hard. 'I think you must learn to rely upon me, and not upon Miss Luttrell,' she said.

'Oh, yes; of course; but not quite in the same way. We shall be hard at work together. It is chiefly what we are marrying for, isn't it? You won't have the time to devote to all the thousand and one little questions that arise when one is burdened with a large house and estate.'

'But surely you are not proposing——! I mean, Miss Luttrell isn't going to live with us.'

He had been sitting reading by one of the windows of the laboratory, which was at the top of the house, and commanded a lovely view of the gardens, park, and well-wooded country beyond, which rose and fell in soft undulations until it reached the sea, five miles away. He looked out over the fair scene, and his face fell. 'I had forgotten for the moment,' he said. 'We are going to leave Steynes, aren't we? After all, I shall be sorry. I would gladly have exchanged this for London six or seven years ago; but now I have got used to it. And it has been Angela's home ever since she was a little girl. She seems to belong to it all.'

'Is that why you asked her to marry you, a few weeks ago?'

She would have recalled the words directly they were spoken. He looked up in surprise, and she said hurriedly, with a laugh: 'Oh, she told me about it; and that you weren't in earnest.'

He said nothing, but turned away his gaze, and allowed it to rest on the woods and the distant sea.

'I shall do everything I can,' she said, still speaking hurriedly, 'to relieve you of the bothers that your mother has taken on her shoulders. I am quite capable of doing it. If you prefer to live here, I am quite willing; and, from what you said, she expected that, until you suggested London yourself.'

He brought his eyes back to her. For the first time they held criticism. 'I hadn't thought of you in that connection at all,' he said. 'I doubt if you could do what my mother does, even if you had no other work to do. I'm quite sure you couldn't do both. No, I'm afraid we must make up our minds to leave Steynes to her. I had hoped that we might all have lived here together, but——'

'I wouldn't live here with Miss Luttrell,' she said. She was fast ceasing to care what effect her words might have upon his view of the situation. She had been prepared to stifle her inward revolts, but not to play an obsequious part to make secure the honour he had conferred upon her.

'You do not like Angela,' he said slowly. 'I am afraid you do not like my mother.' He looked up at her suddenly, and asked, with a whimsical smile: 'Are you sure you like me?'

X

DID she like him—enough to go through with it? That was what she asked herself when she was alone. She had made some non-serious reply to his disconcerting question, and, the dressing-bell ringing at that moment, they had parted, with nothing further settled between them.

Upon the meeting-ground of their common task, she liked him as well as any man she knew. It was an inspiration to work with him, and he gave such ungrudging praise to her as a fellow-worker that the prospect of a lifelong partnership in scientific discovery had been nothing but a delight. She also recognised that his unfailing courtesy and gentleness had their roots in a fine nature, that would never fail her. They had

warmed her feelings towards him, and if he had shown any signs of regarding her with interest as a woman, and not merely as a fellow-scientist, it might not have been long before the weakest point in her position, so unfailingly marked by Lady Kimmeridge and Angela, would have been the strongest. She might easily have come to love him, and then nothing else that now mattered so much would have mattered at all. She would have loved even his helplessness, as the two other women loved it, and she would gladly have sacrificed some of the honours that might be expected to come to her, for the sake of sparing him the distractions that his condition in life brought upon him.

But already the glamour was beginning to fade. As for the work they were to do together, it was plain that the edge of her own capacity was blunted by the divided attention which was all she could bring to it. She knew well enough that she was not helping him now in the work that they had in hand, but hindering him. For his capacity was dulled too, and never could be at its brightest unless he could give his whole mind to his work, as hitherto the protecting care of his mother had enabled him to do. Whether love was in question or not, she would *have* to take his mother's place sooner or later, if his career was not to be spoilt, as well as her own. Was it good enough?

What would she gain? As she dressed for dinner in the large comfortable room which had struck so pleasantly on her senses when she had first come to Steynes Park, she was conscious no longer of satisfaction in her surroundings. She had become used to them. The very dressing for dinner was one of those observances, wasteful of time and energy, which she was fastening on herself for her whole life. Even the dinner itself, that would follow, comparatively simple as all domestic arrangements were for so great a house,

would be irksomely long and elaborate to her, brought up as she had been. And the long evening afterwards, passed in desultory talk, or at best with some music from Angela to lighten the boredom! It was true that, with the armed truce that existed between her and the two ladies, the evenings as they were spent now were worse than anything she would have to look forward to later. The playing of a part, which had become almost intolerably wearisome to her, would not last for ever. But Kimmeridge showed that he liked this complete absence of effort of every sort, as a relief from his strenuous hours. He liked to linger over the table at meal-times; he liked to sit in an easy-chair and listen to Angela's music, or outside on the terrace, chatting idly, about nothing at all, or about nothing that held any interest for her. In the early days of her visit, before he had proposed to her, he and she had done an hour or two's work late in the evening, but Lady Kimmeridge had begged her to discourage this. If his brain was excited, he didn't sleep well. It had happened before that he had broken down under the strain of night as well as day work. Lately he had not wanted to do it, and had even shortened their hours of work in the daytime.

She thought of the merry evenings she had spent in her own poor confined home, with talk and argument upon every subject under the sun—all at their ease, all pleased with one another, nobody standing on any ceremony, if they wanted to go away and do something else. That had been real refreshment; and the absorbing important life-work had been behind it, for all of them to go back to, braced and exhilarated.

But to spend these long evenings with him alone! It would hardly be better than to spend them with him and his mother and cousin. He had no intellectual interests outside his immediate scientific pursuits; even

his social interests were meagre; he would not care to be constantly meeting other people. He liked to be talked to by his womenfolk, to make little jokes with them, to bask in the quiet atmosphere of their affection for him. That was the 'job' she would have to take on—to keep him mildly amused in his hours of recreation—she whose active mind wanted constant stimulus, and who had a hundred interests outside that of her chosen work.

What would she gain as the wife of Lord Kimmeridge, to balance all that she would lose, in freedom of action, zest for daily life, and the career that would be spoilt by the new and strange duties that would be heaped upon her shoulders? A title; wealth; a beautiful house; a high and assured position. Of what use would any of them be to her under the conditions in which she would have them?

If she asked herself these questions, it was without searching diligently for a reply. She went downstairs to meet the women who despised her, and the man whom she was beginning a little to despise, determined to hold to her conquest.

XI

DR MARGARET PLATTER afterwards remembered that evening as the most irksome she had ever spent in her life. Sometimes, in the charming restful room they usually occupied, when Angela had been playing, she had been able to lighten her weariness by a half-surreptitious glance through a book or a magazine, while Kimmeridge sat and smoked interminable cigarettes, and his mother occupied herself with needle-work. She always manœuvred for a seat near a table, so that she might take up whatever printed matter

there was upon it whenever the chance came. But this evening they sat on the terrace just outside the morning-room, and when Angela did go in to play, she still had to sit on, doing nothing, which was purgatory to her.

Kimmeridge was more than usually silent. He smoked one cigarette after another, scarcely speaking a word, for over an hour. Then he seemed to rouse himself. It was when Angela had shut the piano, and came and stood just outside the long open window—a graceful figure in her white dress, leaning against the window-frame. 'Thank you, Angela,' he said, looking up at her. 'You played just the right things. Could one want anything better than to sit out of doors on this lovely night, and listen to quiet beautiful music—perhaps a shade sad, like those Nocturnes?'

He had half-turned towards Margaret Platter, specially inviting her acquiescence in his enjoyment. With all his curious deficiencies in understanding, he never failed to show those little courtesies which would make her feel that she was part of the circle.

She had an impulse of impatient revolt. She was entirely without ear for music, and had hardly been able to support the intense boredom of the long hour that had just passed. Nor had the beauty of the summer night and the mysterious moonlit loveliness of the garden moved her. How willingly would she have exchanged it for the crowded gaslit streets of Camden Town, where her parents lived! She had no particular love for Camden Town as a residential locality, but at any rate there was life there, instead of these long terrible hours of stagnation.

And this was what he liked!

He began to talk now, gently and reminiscently. He talked of Steynes—of his boyhood, of all sorts of little foolish episodes that had taken place here and there, in this or that room of the house, or spot in the garden,

or in the woods or by the sea; mentioning many people by name—old servants, old friends in cottages and farmhouses. Lady Kimmeridge and Angela took their part in the conversation, all three of them giving themselves up to the gentle flow of reminiscence—drivel, Margaret Platter thought it—that gave a tender human meaning to the fair and spacious house and all about it that they loved so well.

When ten o'clock struck from the clock on the stable turret, she could bear it no longer. She pleaded a slight headache, and said good-night. Her bedroom, in which she could read, or write if she wanted to, was a haven from this intolerable dullness. When she reached it she made movements of anger and disgust. It would have relieved her to smash something. She made a strong resolve that when she was once married she would fight against this desolating stagnation. She would do her duty by her husband but she would refuse to waste long valuable hours sitting with her hands in her lap, talking about nothing.

Angela slipped off not long afterwards and Kimmeridge and his mother were left alone together. Their usual hour for retiring was between ten and half-past, but if he showed any inclination to sit on, she usually bore him company. Her brain was as active as Margaret Platter's; the life she now lived was as different as possible from what it had been during the lifetime of her husband, or even when her son had been a boy, and there had been many guests at Steynes. But she was conscious of no weariness in adapting herself to his needs. That was because she loved him. She took a great pride in his scientific achievements, and looked to see him rise to the summit of fame. And she knew so well the conditions under which alone he could do full justice to himself. His brain, so fiercely active during his hours of work, wanted nothing but rest

outside them; and his bodily strength was only equal to the demands which his concentration made upon it if it was carefully conserved and watched over. She gave herself gladly to the task, and had her reward in the rather pathetic dependence he showed towards her. It always touched her—that he should be so contented with her companionship, in his hours of recreation—hers and Angela's; for she thought that Angela loved him too, and would be glad to give herself to him in the same way.

He threw away his cigarette, and took another out of his case. 'I want to say something to you, dear mother,' he said.

A spurt of hope lit up the blank fear and dejection of her mind. Her quiet: 'Yes, Henry,' was said on an involuntary intake of breath.

'I am afraid I have made a mistake.'

She could have wept for the relief and joy of it. But his next words brought her to herself. 'It's too late to alter it now.'

Was it too late? Did his not-understanding word, so lightly, so foolishly given, commit him to a lifelong repentance of his error? She could not think so; but must wait until she knew what was in his mind before she could do battle for him.

His next words were quite unexpected. She had thought that he would tell her how he had come to see that he had made a mistake; but he put all that on one side, and said: 'I want to ask you if you can't reconsider your decision about living here—with us.'

It was a bitter disappointment to her. With the terms she had imposed upon herself in her dealings with him, she could not directly question his decision; she could only lie in wait for an opportunity of expressing her own doubts. But she knew his nice sense of honour too well to have much hope that he would draw back.

'Oh, my dear boy,' she said, with pain in her voice, 'I would do much more than that for you. If you want me with you, I will stay—if it is possible.'

'I do want you, mother; and I think I want to stay here, at Steynes. For one thing, I am not sure that I ought to leave it. I don't amount to much as a landlord, I'm afraid; but the people all know me, and I think I am of some use to them, although you are of so much more.'

'There is nothing that you need reproach yourself with in that way, dear Henry. It is only the details, the business part, that you are spared. In every other way you are just what you ought to be towards your people. And of course they would miss you.'

'I am glad you think that, mother. If it is so, I have been very fortunate in being able to combine my work and my other duties, and to enjoy them both. Oh, I know how much I have to thank you for making that possible. I think I ought to go on living here; but I can see now that nothing would go right, unless you were here, too. Why did you say you would stay if it were possible? Why shouldn't it be possible?'

She did not reply immediately. She was trying to find words that would do more than merely answer his question. 'I have done what I have as mistress of Steynes,' she said. 'When you are married, I shall no longer be mistress of Steynes. And it wouldn't only be for you to ask me to go on living here.'

He answered at once. 'I have thought over all that. I have said that I have made a mistake. I wouldn't say that to anybody but you, and I shall never say it again, after to-night. The mistake I have made wouldn't only affect me, if one didn't do one's best to mend it. What I offered to Margaret was an equal partnership in my work. I think she has come to see that that will be impossible, if she has to make up for my deficiencies,

as you have so wonderfully done hitherto. I believe she is willing to make the sacrifice, but I ought not to ask it of her. She has as much right to the chance of developing her powers as I have. They are remarkable powers, and the world would be the poorer without them. It will be all to her advantage to have you with us here, mother, and she is so clever and clear-sighted that she can hardly be blind to it. I must do my best to make her happy, as she has trusted her happiness to me. And I know you will do your best to help me in that, as you have helped me in everything else.’

The tears were in her eyes. ‘Yes, dear boy,’ she said. ‘We will make the best of it, both of us together.’

She could say nothing of all that was in her mind. She saw that his eyes had been opened, but she did not know how much. If he still retained his faith in the woman who had taken advantage of his previous blindness, she must say nothing to destroy it. She must make the best of her, both for him and for herself. She must take up the burden of a new life, and by all means hide from him how heavy it was.

XII

WHEN Margaret Platter went up to her room, she prepared herself in her slow deliberate way for a comfortable hour with a book. She took a seat by the open window about the time that Angela said good-night. Her room was on the second floor, immediately above where they were sitting on the terrace. The voices came up to her quite clearly in the still night, but she paid little heed to them until after the silence that followed Angela’s departure. Then she heard Kimmeridge’s speech: ‘I have made a mistake’; and laid down her book with a startled look in her eyes.

She heard the conversation right through; and long after it was over, and the servants had come to take in the chairs and to shut up down below, she sat on, looking out into the night.

When at last she arose and prepared herself for bed, she was wondering how she could have come to put herself into such a false position. She was bitterly ashamed of herself. She had doggedly set herself to listen to a confidential conversation, hardening her heart to the mortifying things that would surely be said of her after such an opening, and she had heard from first to last only what brought home to her the baseness of her own attitude towards such people as these.

She had been considering whether it was 'good enough'—for herself. No thought had entered her mind of whether it was good enough for the man who had offered her his hand. If she had come to the conclusion that she did not want what she had accepted from him, she would have taken her freedom. He had been considering too, and had found out that he had made a mistake. But it had not apparently occurred to him even to ask her for his freedom, although he had become aware that she was dissatisfied, and might at least have hoped that she would be ready to give it to him. No; he was thinking of what he owed to her, on account of his too hasty offer.

And his mother, who had known all along that he had made a mistake, and whose hopes for him had been deeply disappointed—she had not said a word of all that she might have said to dissuade him from fulfilling his promise. She was ready to make the best of it for him, and help him to make the best of it for the woman whom she disliked, and despised.

What was left after that, of all the arguments with which she had defended herself against herself for carrying through her purpose? Nothing much but

Angela's charge that she was proposing to use this childlike, kind, generous man for a 'climb up.'

She came down late for breakfast the next morning. She had lain awake until the sun had streamed into her windows, and then, having got rid of all the rubbish that had been filling her mind for weeks past, she fell asleep, and slept again after she had been called.

Her face had a look of serenity that had been absent from it since she had first come to Steynes. Angela saw a different woman in her, and the difference puzzled her, and distressed her too, for she thought it could only mean that she now saw her way clear; and yet it did not look quite like that either. Lady Kimmeridge, whose eyes and face were tired after a sleepless night, also saw the difference, but it did not distress her. She had made up her mind to accept this woman, and to like her, if she could possibly compass that difficult feat; and she saw her now dimly with the qualities that might make it possible to like her in the ascendant. Kimmeridge saw nothing. He was rather graver than usual, but not uncheerful.

They met in the laboratory at their usual time, and worked steadily through the morning. When the time came for them to leave off, he said with his kind smile: 'You've been splendid this morning. What a lot we shall do together by-and-by!'

Her eyes were just a little moist and her cheeks a little flushed as she said: 'Perhaps we shall work together again by-and-by, but I have come to the conclusion that we shall both do our work better if we forget what we have said about being married. I am grateful to you for the honour you did me in asking me to be your wife, but I—I don't want to marry.'

Even now he thought of her first. The sudden look of relief, to which she had nerved herself, did not appear on his face. It was concerned, as he looked at

her and said: 'I am not very clever apart from—this.' He motioned with his hand towards the material of their investigations. 'Have I done anything, or left undone anything, that has disturbed you?'

'No,' she said. 'You have shown yourself all that you ought to be. I mean it when I say that I am grateful to you. But we are not suited to one another. Let us be friends, and forget that we ever thought of being more.'

Still he was too scrupulous to take his release straight away. He had seen, very dimly, because such thoughts were foreign to him, that he had offered her great worldly advantage, and it seemed to him that there ought to be some way of compensating her for giving up everything. But he had no idea in what way she could be compensated, and his mind turned towards his invariable refuge from material difficulties. He smiled at her and said: 'Let me talk to my mother, first, before we decide anything. Perhaps——'

She returned his smile, and hers was now as pleasant to see as his was. 'I will talk to her,' she said. 'But I have made up my mind already. That is why we worked together so well this morning.'

It was after luncheon that she talked to Lady Kimmeridge, in the room in which they had at first clashed swords.

'I have already told Henry,' she said, 'and I told him I would tell you. I don't want to marry him.'

Lady Kimmeridge looked utterly bewildered. For the moment she was unable to take in the statement, and all that it meant to her, and to her son.

'I think we have both made a mistake,' said Margaret. 'I am glad I have seen mine before it was too late.'

The words struck a chord in Lady Kimmeridge's memory. Her expression changed. 'Did you hear what we said on the terrace last night?' she asked.

The question was unexpected. Margaret looked down in confusion, but recovered herself quickly. ‘Yes, I did,’ she said boldly. ‘I hadn’t meant to say so, but if you know that, then you will know why I give him up. What I heard brought me to my senses. Perhaps I shouldn’t have listened at all if I hadn’t lost them for a time.’

Lady Kimmeridge went rapidly over as much as she could recall of what had been said, still rather shocked in spite of the frank avowal, that it should have been overheard. ‘Is it because he said that he wanted me to live with you here?’ she asked.

‘It’s because I ought never to have accepted him. I don’t love him, though I might, perhaps, if he loved me. Certainly, he is worth a woman’s love. You won’t ask me to say more than that. It is all that really matters, isn’t it?’

Lady Kimmeridge looked at her earnestly, and her face bore a strong resemblance at that moment to her son’s. Then she kissed her gently, and said: ‘My dear, I think you must have come to love him a little, or you wouldn’t give him up.’

THE BUILDER

I

His father was a bricklayer, not drunken enough to lose the chance of work, and not sober enough to keep himself and his family above the border line of poverty. He lived in an old group of cottages on the outskirts of the town, which were much admired by visitors and had been more than once condemned by sanitary inspectors.

During his childhood, building in and about the ancient town had sunk to a very low ebb. Years before it had scornfully rejected the railway, which, in revenge, had filched its prosperity and made a thriving place of its once despised neighbour four miles away. Building had gone on busily in the new town, and drawn most of those engaged in the trade away from the old. But there was enough to keep the few that remained behind in employment. His father was a good workman, when he was sober, and had his share in whatever was going on.

The child loved nothing better than to go where there was building being done. There was no competition between him and his brothers to escape from the duty—the somewhat heavy duty—of carrying their father's dinner beer. He would have fought for the privilege if there had been any one to fight. For, having temporarily assuaged his father's thirst, he would be permitted to see what was doing.

The mortar in its bed of lime, the stacks of new bricks, the tiles and slates and laths, the timbers and boarding, the cleverly roped scaffolding, the ladders,

the pipes and chimneys, the door and window frames, the work of joiners, glaziers, plumbers, painters, and decorators, all had an irresistible fascination for him. He loved all the materials of building and grew to know all about them, as his brothers knew all about the nests and eggs of birds, and the life of the country around them.

The builder's yard, with its stored up collection of lumber, was a paradise to him, and because it was a usually forbidden paradise, he loved it the more ardently. He could tell the quality of a brick at a glance; he could tell whether work was well and truly done or whether it was scamped; he had an eye for points of construction. A well-laid course of brickwork, neatly pointed, was a thing to gloat over; he would climb surreptitiously on to the scaffolding, away from that side of the house where his father and his mates were eating their dinners, and admire the pitch of the roof timbers, passing his hand lovingly over the carpenters' work, and sometimes shaking his small head over it. He came to know something of values, and when he was let free of school, and, for a small wage, mixed mortar and carried half loads of bricks in a hod up ladders, or did any other job that could be put on to a boy of twelve, he would have been quite capable of taking a place in the builder's office, for he was quick at figures, and the materials over which reckonings were made were as familiar to him as the food he ate—what there was of it.

But the way to that success in his trade which he afterwards acquired did not lie through the training of the counting house. He worked with the materials of building themselves, toiling under the open sky, liking his work, and taking a pride in every detail of it, not anxious, like the rest of his fellows, to lay down his tools at the exact moment of release, or taking them up tardily when the time came to do so. He was even a

little suspicious of the trade union which he presently joined, and which did not encourage an over zealousness in labour. And, later on, the trade unions did not love him.

Of all his qualities, which included an extraordinary and perhaps inherited aptitude for manipulation, a certainly not inherited love of hard work, a power of going without, and so saving money, a quickness of brain, and a faculty for getting a great deal out of other people, perhaps the one that most affected his career was an obstinate and disagreeable self-sufficiency, which caused him to rely upon himself, and himself alone. It affected him adversely at the beginning, for he would certainly have been taken into partnership with his old master if it had been at all possible to get on with him. As it was, he was driven into independence and opposition before he was quite ready, and lost most of his savings by attempting to do too much or too little.

But he rallied from that blow, and with what was left, picking up a little job here and a slightly bigger one there, he made his way slowly, and living hard and working hard, scraped together capital to embark upon the schemes he had had in his mind from the first.

The town was growing now. Its fame as a picturesque place in the midst of lovely country, wonderfully little spoilt, considering everything, was attracting residents. There were new houses to be built for people who could not get old ones, there were old houses to be adapted. On the western side of the town, between it and the new golf links, a pleasant suburb grew up, of good houses with large gardens. And smaller houses were wanted too, houses for the revived tradespeople, active or retired, cottages for the workpeople, both those who ministered to the wants of the growing population and those who were making ready for its increase.

It was the cottage property on which the sage builder had his eye. There was nothing like it. You snapped up a piece of land with a frontage—building land was rising in value now, and was difficult to get—and you ran up a row of brick boxes with slate lids, as many as you could cram into the space, and they were off your hands, with a good profit to each, before you had cleaned the round patch of whitewash off the window panes.

It was not necessary to employ an architect to design them for you. You could do that very well for yourself; and architects, besides being expensive, were apt to have faddy ideas which ate away your profits. As many cottages as possible on a given piece of ground, quick but sound work—for no architect could have hated jerry-building more than this man who loved his trade—and quick and fair profits—that was the way to do business. The slow erection of the bigger houses, where you were hampered all the time by the whims of people who did not know their own minds two weeks running, could be left for the present to the older established men, who worked in the approved old-fashioned style.

A good architect would prepare a good plan and would overlook its leisurely carrying out, altering it frequently in detail as the work progressed. And about two months or more after the house had been timed to be finished, the old fashioned builder would withdraw his men and pronounce it ready for occupation. There were good profits to be made out of that class of building when you had a large and regular staff, and a sufficient capital. But it could wait for the present.

So ran the thoughts of the small man, busy with his little jobs, and gathering together his difficult coins, disregarded in his insignificance, but intending to be disregarded not for very long.

II

HE bought the row of cottages in which he had been brought up for a small sum, when nobody, so to speak, was looking, evicted the tenants, his father who now worked for him among them, pulled down the irregular picturesque insanitary dwellings, and built fifteen hideously plain and regular ones in their place.

If that sort of thing went on, said the indignant residents, when they woke up to what was happening, the place would very soon be ruined. But he did not care in the least for that sort of protest. He hardly heard it, for he only emerged from the dimly seen underworld of labour with that transaction, and what the superior residents thought or said filtered through to him only as a faint and unconsidered echo. Besides, he had made three hundred pounds clear profit.

Late on the night after he had disposed of his last cottage, the whole transaction now being closed and the good money lodged in the bank, he walked the streets of the town in a sort of grim ecstasy, too restless to go home to his bed, and unwilling that any one should see him stripped, however so little, of his plating of hard reserve.

The streets were empty and his boots rang on the worn stones and made echoes among the old buildings. The yellow lights of the street lamps showed glimpses of moulded brickwork, solid timber, broad eaves, small-paned windows; and a new moon peeping out fitfully from behind scudding clouds shone on the high mellow-tiled gabled roofs and twisted chimney stacks. Whatever of change had crept in amongst all this ancient contented placidity was softened by the dim light into agreement with the rest. Take away the new shop-fronts in the Market Square, and the pretentious

modern Bank, which had usurped the place of an Elizabethan timbered house, and an inhabitant of a hundred years back would have found nothing strange or unfamiliar if he had stood in the shadow of the church and looked about him. The visitors and the superior residents were right. This was a town that by good fortune was singularly little spoilt; a grateful survival of a less hurried, more beautiful age. And here was the man, prowling its streets at midnight, ambitious, determined, and alas! unconsidered, who was going to change all that.

He stood in the shadow of the church and, in the winter silence of midnight, considered it. Some emanation from the spirit of the place wrought upon him, quieted, for a time, his eagerness, and on his unimpressionable mind stamped faintly an unfamiliar impression. Beauty of form, of atmosphere, he was blind to. But he had an ingrained appreciation of the materials of his trade, their substance, texture, use, and circumstance. He had known that the work of these old builders was good work, but now something from outside seemed to tell him that it was better than he had known. It was as if, having got him alone, they were crowding round him and imploring him to save what their hands had made.

The influences about him had this effect that he thought for a time, standing motionless by a great buttress that jutted on to the pavement, of the work that had been put into those old buildings. He would have liked to build like that, himself, sometimes—with somebody else's money—to put in the best materials and the best craftsmanship, both where they would show and where they would be hidden. It was a pity that modern improvement made it necessary to destroy such sound work, and modern conditions made it impossible to put work as sound in its place.

He got no further than that. He was firmly convinced that the building of houses had made enormous strides for the better since the days in which these old houses had been put up. It had learnt economy of space for one thing; it had adapted itself to new conditions of life, so that servants were no longer penned into underground cellars; it had learnt sanitation, and heating, and all sorts of other things.

And the range of material to hand was double as wide. The best machine-made bricks were as durable as hand-made ones, and their larger size made them cheaper in the laying; slates kept out the weather better than tiles, and looked neater; walls well plastered and prettily papered were preferable to the old extravagant wainscoting; steel girders could be used instead of oak beams; you could make cement look like stone by scoring lines on it.

In his rare mood of receptivity he weighed a little the criticism that had been passed and come through to him, and dangerously saw beyond it. What was all this talk about things being old? These buildings were not good because they were old. They had been just as good when they were new. Their builders, with the means at their command, had satisfied the needs of their age, and he, with wider means, was going to satisfy the needs of his. Other conditions had stepped in. Land and labour were dearer, time was less, population much greater. And the changed conditions were as much a part of his business as the construction of walls and roofs and floors. You built to meet the current demands of life. The activity of the speculative builder, anticipating a demand and providing for it, was a more living and useful activity than that of the cultured architect who administered to the exotic claims of the few.

In his own way he thought out these things, and his

slight uneasiness vanished. It was as if the spirits of the old builders, pleading with him, had departed in despair of teaching him those other lessons of beauty allied to fitness, and springing out of it, which they had also learnt in their vanished time.

He walked home through the silent streets, hugging once more his dreams of the future, and never knew as he went straight to his poor habitation that he had taken a wrong turning, having gone nearer than he ever afterwards came to taking the right one.

III

THE development of that small building speculation followed with almost startling rapidity. He was fortunate in the early stages, made money and spent none, got money, as the phrase goes, behind him, and long before he had hoped for it bought out his old master and was running up two streets of houses on the outskirts of the town, on land which had been previously occupied by a fine old house with four or five acres of garden and orchard.

It was at this time that the outcry from the superior residents, echoed from outside, began directly to reach him. But it troubled him little. Let them cry out! His orderly rows of neat brick villas were on the opposite side of the town to their houses and the golf links, and would do them no harm. Besides, they were there now and nobody could shift them.

And, after all, nobody had been willing to pay the price to keep the old house. If it had been worth more to them to keep than to him to destroy why hadn't they put down their money. He had offered at one time, when the little storm had looked likely to become a big one, to let the property go at only a small profit on

what he had paid for it. But the objectors had not put down their money, and the old wistaria-covered white house with its beautiful gardens was put down instead, and the red brick villas, of which all the plans had been prepared in his office, were put up.

At about the time he was starting on this big and lucrative undertaking he found time to attend to the affairs of his soul, and joined the Methodists. He was a regular member of the congregation, paid his share with the rest, for whatever was wanted, and when the long-cherished scheme of replacing the old meeting-house with a new and elaborate 'church' was at last put into execution, largely through his encouragement, he got the contract, as a matter of course.

His share towards the expense was the saving of architect's fees. He must be paid for his work as a builder, of course; the labourer was worthy of his hire. But he would prepare the plans, and see to their carrying out for nothing.

His offer was considered a most generous one. They could hardly hope to vie with the splendours of the great abbey church, but they would have by far the largest Nonconformist place of worship in the town, and if a little extra money could be got together to add a Gothic spire, of which 'our brother,' without any additional charge, had already prepared a most tasteful design, they flattered themselves that the new church, with the advantage of a fine site, would be almost as conspicuous an object as the old.

It was, in truth, almost more conspicuous, when it came to be built, and the mean and ridiculous spire was added in due time. For the old church had a low square tower, and the spire overtopped it by at least ten feet. And the old, low, mellow red-brick chapel, with its paved garden-square and the minister's house adjoining it, was a thing of the past.

Most of the old shops in the Market Square were by this time also things of the past. Some had been pulled down and rebuilt entirely, some had been refaced and carried a story higher; plate glass windows were everywhere, only two or three of the smaller bow-windowed small-paned fronts having been left.

The outcry had gathered voice now, but it was still surprisingly incompetent to arouse action. The builder who had struck the first serious blow was responsible for a good deal of the change, and he was one of the most thriving men in the place. He was also, by this time, thoroughly aware of the opposition he had aroused, but was moved by it no more than before. 'Spoiling the town!' he would exclaim. 'I'm making the town. Is it more prosperous than it was, or isn't it?'

Unfortunately, there was no denying that it was vastly more prosperous. For one thing, the new main line had come, and it was now within an hour's direct journey of London. It had got the name of a first-class residential place, and nothing that was done seemed to affect the influx of new people. The pleasant suburb between the town and the golf links spread farther and farther. 'I'm not fool enough to buy land and put up cottages *there*,' the builder would say. 'It would depreciate the property. Why can't they be content with what they have got?'

They had to be content, with that and the great church and the Market Square, and the famous town hall, and the old shops and houses that still remained; for much of the rest had gone, and all round the old town, except on their side, was a waste of new streets, and almost a new town altogether. They had not put their hands in their pockets at the time when they might have saved it, and it is doubtful whether their pockets would have been deep enough in any case, for what can stand against the irresistible pressure of modern

life, and who really cares enough for the past to save more than a fragment of it here and there?

IV

It was Paradine, the famous architect, who brought some of his sins home to him, but even he did not succeed in making him repentant. Nobody could have done that.

He was a rich man now, a good deal richer than many of those who occupied the best houses in the new suburb, now quite a respectably old suburb; and he made up his mind that he would build himself a house there.

He bought half an acre of land at a price bigger than he had yet paid for any land. It was part of three acres that had gone to the garden of one of the first of the new good houses, and its owner addressed him thus before they came to terms:—

‘The land is no good to me, and it is quite planted out by this time. I shall be glad to sell it for building at the price I ask, and I have no objection to you as a neighbour. But I do make this proviso, that the house you build shall be designed by a good architect. We rather pride ourselves on doing things well here, and it would be unneighbourly of me to allow a house to be put up that would spoil the look of the place.’

The builder frowned. ‘There’s been a lot of talk about spoiling the place,’ he said. ‘All the spoiling that I can see is that I am obliged to pay as much for half an acre now as you paid, sir, for three.’

‘Our views on that matter are not likely to agree,’ said the seller. ‘If you can’t accept my terms I won’t part with the land.’

‘Well, I’m going to have a house that suits me,’ said the builder, ‘and I’m not going to spare expense in building it. It will be a good house. I’ve got a plan

sketched out, and I don't think anybody could find anything to object to in it. It's Gothic—oh, a fine place it will be. I've no objection to showing you the elevation.'

'I'm afraid that won't do. I don't know anything about architecture, but I have promised my friends I will stipulate for a first-class architect.'

'Isn't it rather hard to prevent a man building the sort of house he wants for himself?'

'You may build it, and welcome, but unless you get a good architect to design it for you, you won't build it here.' They were standing in the paddock, with its hundred yards of frontage, masked by limes and poplars from the houses on either side.

'This isn't the only piece of land I could buy, Colonel, if I liked to pay the price.'

'No; and I'm not asking you to buy it. It's as you please. I have named my terms.'

'And I've agreed to them.'

'Not to the most important.'

The builder looked round him. He had set his heart on this site.

'Would Paradine do?' he asked, after a pause. 'There's a lot of talk about Mr Paradine. I dare say it would pay me to give him a job; he might return the compliment.'

'Paradine would do very well.'

'Well, I'll think about it and let you know to-morrow. I dare say me and Mr Paradine could work together. I'll show him my plans, if I decide to employ him, and I dare say he can improve upon them in a way that will please you and please me.'

'If Mr Paradine likes to work in that way I shall be satisfied. Very well, then, we'll leave it at that for the present.'

So the big man came down, and the builder drove him from the station to inspect the site. He was a thin

nervous man, with delicate hands and a stoop of the shoulders, and spoke in a soft, rather querulous voice. 'I have not been here since I was a boy,' he said. 'My uncle was the Rector, and I used to stay with him.'

'Well, you will see very great improvements, sir,' said the builder; 'and I may say, without blowing my own trumpet, that I have been more responsible for them than any one else.'

A shudder passed through the architect's frame as they drove along one side of the Market Square, but he said nothing, and the builder expatiated on the changes he had brought about, drawing particular attention to the Methodist chapel, which he claimed as his *magnus opus*.

'You built that!' exclaimed the architect, fixing a horrified gaze on the pitiable Cockney spire, which, like a short-lived weed, seemed to have exhausted all its strength in overtopping the massive solidity of the neighbouring tower.

'Designed *and* built it,' said the builder proudly, for he had lost all diffidence in face of his companion's mild, nervous manner. 'We builders know a thing or two. Now I've got some drawings in my office'—he had not intended to mention this—'which I thought of carrying out in the new house; something in the same style as the church, with a bit of a spire too, and some traceried windows—I don't grudge the expense; I want to have everything good. I thought between us we might work up something tasty out of them. When you have seen the site, we——'

'Wait a minute,' said the architect, extending a lean hand toward the driver, and turning on the builder a pained, inquiring face. 'Do I understand you that you have already prepared plans for your new house?'

'Well, only provisional, you understand. If you think well of my ideas, as I'm sure you will, what I thought was that between us——'

But Mr Paradine interrupted him. 'I think there has been some mistake,' he said. 'I will get back to the station. I would not have left London if I had known. My time is valuable.' And he put out his hand again, to stop the driver.'

'Oh, wait a minute, sir,' said the builder, aghast. 'I'm sure I didn't mean—just a suggestion, you know. If you would just cast your eye over the drawings.'

'I won't look at your pestilent drawings,' said the architect violently, changed in the twinkling of an eye from a meek person who could be instructed, almost patronised, into a man of purple wrath and unbridled expression.

'Eh! What!' exclaimed the builder helplessly, his eyes staring.

'What do you mean, sir, by asking me to come down here and talking to me of your filthy scribbings? Do you know who I am, by any chance?'

'Oh, come, sir,' said the builder apologetically; 'nobody knows better than me what a reputation you've got. I'm sure it never so much as entered my head to——'

'Do you want me to build you a house?' snapped the architect.

'Yes, sir, of course. I want the best house I can get for the money, and there's nobody who will make out a better plan than you. I know that well enough. That's why I took the liberty of asking you——'

'It *was* a liberty, a great liberty. I don't know why I came here. But now I am here, I will build you a house. You will tell me the number of rooms you want, and the money you are prepared to spend. Any details as to the arrangement of the house for the way you wish to live in it I will listen to. But you won't have a word to say as to the style of architecture, or the decoration, or anything else, and you will carry out the

plan with the very best materials, under my directions. Do you understand that?’

‘I am to take it or leave it.’

‘You are to take it in its entirety, or you are, as you say, to leave it. I don’t care which you do. And if you ever speak to me again about the vile exhibitions of vulgarity and ignorance with which you have brought ruin on this beautiful old town, I’ll—I’ll—well, I don’t know what I shall do; but, upon my word, when I think of what this place used to be and what it is now, I feel inclined to go and cut my throat. What is the good of me and men like me learning and thinking and working all our lives, and trying to make headway against the gross wicked blindness of the time, when people like you can destroy in a month more than we can do in a lifetime? It makes me despair.’

He ended on a note of gentle melancholy, and the builder plucked up courage, surprised and a little alarmed as he was at the outburst, to say, ‘Oh, well, sir, there’s two sides to that question; but I’m sure I shall be flattered to live in a house of your designing, and so will the wife; and as for the work put into it, you’ll have no reason to complain about that.’

The architect sank back against the cushions of the fly, his explosion over, and hardly spoke again until the builder left him at the station an hour or so later.

‘He’s a rum ‘un, and no mistake,’ said the man of bricks and mortar to his wife, to whom he had given an account of the episode. ‘I don’t know why I gave way to him, I’m sure. But there’s no doubt he’s a first-class man. A house by him will keep their tongues from wagging. He gave me something, he did. Vulgarity and ignorance, eh? Well, he knows his job and I know mine, and we’ve both done pretty well out of them.’

V

'Well, there's your house,' said Paradine, the great architect, a year or so later. 'You won't know how to live in it, but that's not my affair. It is one of the best of its size I have ever built.'

'It's a beautiful 'ouse, sir, a *beautiful* 'ouse,' said the builder enthusiastically.

They were standing in the paved courtyard in front of it. The work was finished, and all the untidy traces of the workmen's labours had been removed. The house, of warm red brick, with tiled broad-eaved roofs, fluted chimney stacks, well-proportioned windows, boldly decorated doorway, was ready to receive its occupants, and help them to whatever domestic pleasures they desired in life. It really was a beautiful house, beautiful in its fine simplicity, as well as in its sparse decoration, and beautiful in the way it enshrined the idea of a home: and the builder, who had contributed to it the best of material and workmanship, and had learnt something during its erection, was sincere in his admiration.

'Yes; and I should like to know what sort of a beastly dog-kennel you would have put up here if you had had your own way,' said the architect, turning a whimsical eye on him. He had had *his* way in every detail; he had kept the man whose money he had been spending under a firmly placed thumb, and he had come to like him.

The builder grinned and scratched his head. 'It has cost just double the money I meant to spend,' he said.

'Well, it's worth it, eh?'

'Yes, sir, it's worth it. I wouldn't have it altered. I've taken a pride in it.'

'And that is what you have never done before, my

friend, in any of the abominations of desolation you are responsible for.'

'Oh, come, sir, that isn't fair. I've always been proud of putting in good materials and good work.'

'To do you justice, I believe you have. And I don't know that it doesn't make your offence worse. You are like a dressmaker who would cut up silks and laces and sew them together well, and yet not care in the least what the dress she made of them looked like, or whether it fitted or not.'

'Ah, but it does fit. What I've done, and what you're so down on, *does* fit. It supplies a want. When the want really changes I'll be ready to meet it. You don't think I wouldn't rather build a house like this than the sort of house I'm accustomed to build, do you? This is my home, and I'm ready to spend my money on it and have it good. Others haven't got so much money, and they must do with something cheaper.'

The architect sighed and turned away. 'I'm afraid it is so,' he said. 'And cheapness means ugliness, nowadays. It needn't, you know. It used not to. Come, now, haven't you learnt that lesson while we have been working together?'

The builder hesitated again. 'Well, I can see in a sort of way,' he said, 'that our ornament's all wrong.'

'Oh, ornament!' exclaimed the other, with a shrug.

'Yes, I know,' the builder hastened to say. 'Much better do without it altogether. And I'm going to, for the future.' He grinned. 'It'll come cheaper, anyway. But I suppose you can see this, sir—if I had spent what it has cost to make this house what it is, over and above what I require, on the other houses I've built here, it's quite certain that it would never have been built at all. I shouldn't have made my money.'

The architect turned again towards the new walls. 'It has cost,' he said, 'the beauty of a whole town to build this one house.'

AUDACIOUS ANN

I

It all began with Mary Polegate's illuminated chart of the kings of Juda and Israel. This work of art had its inception before Ann came to the school, and would have been finished and presented to Miss Sutor in time to prevent the trouble that came of it, but for a grave disaster that had befallen the first attempt. Misled by the resemblance of names between King Jehoiakim and his son, King Jehoiachin, Mary Polegate had given the latter an 'm' instead of an 'n,' and her efforts to correct the mistake had spoilt the fine perfection of the work, by this time, together with the Christmas term, nearing its completion. So she had resigned herself to beginning all over again, supported by the gratifying sympathy of the whole school, and not altogether displeased, after she had got over her first disappointment, at having something to do in her spare hours that would arouse general interest for a whole term longer than she had anticipated.

Mary Polegate was a very good girl. She had never been known to be late for anything during the five years she had been at Miss Sutor's school, and as for reading play books in prep., or tearing out pages of her rough notebook to write letters on, she would have been incapable of such deeds, even before she was a monitor. She was not among Miss Sutor's brightest pupils, and while that lady treated her with invariable patience and consideration, Miss Henderson, the second mistress,

was apt to be sarcastic at her expense. But Mary Polegate received her sarcasms with a bland and beautiful meekness, which arose partly from her equability of temper, partly from her inability to understand the shafts aimed at her. Other girls who did understand them expressed their indignation with Miss Henderson among themselves, and made up for her unkindness by being specially nice to Mary Polegate.

There were between forty and fifty girls at 'The Cedars,' Miss Sutor's school. Until Ann's arrival there had been only one day-pupil, Hilda Lang, the daughter of the doctor who attended the school. Dr Lang also attended Lady Sinclair, who lived in a large house on the sea-front, and when Ann came to live with her grandmother it was arranged that she too should be a day-pupil at Miss Sutor's school. This was a fortnight or so after the beginning of the Easter term, when Mary Polegate's illuminated chart had reached Jehosaphat, and she was nearing the end of her first shell of gold.

Ann was received at 'The Cedars' with a degree of attention that would have turned the heads of most girls of thirteen. Her grandmother was a well-known resident of the town, and her handsome equipage brought her every Sunday to the church attended by Miss Sutor's school. She was known to be rich and generous, and to like 'young things.' Hilda Lang had been to tea at her house, to be introduced to Ann, and her account of the entertainment was enthusiastic. Lady Sinclair had told Ann in her hearing that when she got to know her new schoolfellows she might ask some of them to tea every Saturday. Furthermore, Ann had her own sitting-room on the top floor of the big house overlooking the sea, and her bedroom next to it. They had been beautifully furnished for her, and she was allowed to do what she liked with them in the

way of decoration. She had a little maid, the niece of Lady Sinclair's own maid, with whom she was also apparently allowed to do much as she liked, or, at any rate, did it, whether allowed or not. She had a most extensive wardrobe for a child of her age, and, indeed, her first appearance in church, in a beautifully tailored coat and skirt of pastel blue cloth, with a cap and fur of silver fox, had aroused admiring comment, before she had been known. She had half a crown a week pocket money, besides occasional golden windfalls from visiting uncles with high-sounding names. In fact, she was in process of being spoilt all round, and the tendency among the girls at Miss Sutor's was to help on the process when she first came among them.

Ann was a young person of unusual attractions. She had large gray eyes and a straight little nose, the bridge of which was adorned with faint freckles, and a short upper lip that showed a row of beautiful teeth whenever she smiled or laughed, which was frequently. She had the most delicate skin, through which the colour that came and went so readily with her showed more than she could have wished, as it made her feelings of the moment too apparent. Her hair was a warm brown, and fell into natural waves and curls. It stood out round her head like a nimbus, and had not been allowed to grow long. She was straight and thin, with a figure rather like a boy's, and looked younger than her years on that account, and because of the clothes she wore. Her mother had been French, and she had lived the greater part of her life in France, where girls of her age are dressed more childishly than in England. Her frocks still stopped short at the knees, and she was very lacy and frilly on occasions when it was suitable to be so.

Both her parents were dead, and she had been brought up with a large family of cousins, partly in Paris, partly in a château in Touraine, with long visits to

English relations interspersed. French was her natural tongue, but she spoke English with a perfect accent, except for the faintest little trill of the 'r's, which her fine musical ear told her was wrong, but which she could never quite overcome. Her English vocabulary, however, was not equal to her requirements, and she eked it out with a liberal use of French words, or with literal translations of French phrases. She tried to get the better of this, although it was considered an added attraction by her admirers, and she made fast progress when she came to live in England. But in moments of excitement she would relapse, and it amused her to make use of many expressions not usual on the lips of young girls, though otherwise harmless, which she had picked up from her male cousins.

She had other accomplishments. She played the violin—she had a perfect little model of a Nicola Gagliano—with great purity of tone. She also played hockey, with a complete absence of fear, and, when she began to know something about the game, with ever increasing skill. She could make people laugh, and laughed herself, with such entire appreciation of her own jokes, and looked so 'sweet' when she did so, that some of the older girls were always wanting to embrace her. But she presented such an angular frame to the attempt, and was so sparing of her own endearments, that the phase gradually wore off, and by the time she had been at the school for a week she was accepted as a person of independent character who refused to be taken up by anybody.

Her chief friend was Hilda Lang, who was a year older than herself, but soon settled down to follow her leadership. The girls she asked to tea at her grandmother's house were those in her own class. She attached herself to no 'big girl,' but treated them all as if she were at least their equal.

II

AFTER a time, Ann's audacity in this respect began to weigh upon her elders. It was not what the school was accustomed to. She played pranks. She changed the gym shoes of the elder girls, hanging up in holland bags in the cloak-room, and did not even change them in pairs, which would have led to less confusion and waste of time. Margaret Parbury, the head girl, told her to report herself to Miss Sutor, and when Ann had satisfied herself that the order was according to law she obeyed it, with an engaging smile upon her face, as if she quite expected Miss Sutor to appreciate the joke as much as she and Hilda Lang had done. She received her 'talking to' with bright amiability, and readily promised not to offend in this way again.

But the very next week she brought a jumping wooden frog to school, and having carefully practised its range, caused it to alight upon Mabel Finney's *Corneille*, as she was reading aloud with a heavy British accent during the course of a French lesson. Mabel Finney was short-sighted, and happened to have been born with a strong distaste for frogs, of which she thought she saw a live specimen before her. She shrieked, and dropped her spectacles, and there was a general scandalised commotion, which Ann appeared to enjoy excessively. Mademoiselle was very angry with her, and said she should certainly tell Miss Sutor; but she was young and rather homesick, and Ann presently read a passage in a way that so deliciously soothed her much-tried ears that she let her off.

But the class, as a whole, was incensed against her. It was the First French Class, and Ann, who was by far the youngest girl in it, should have comported herself with modesty on that account. This was

explained to her, and she only laughed, which incensed her critics still further. Margaret Parbury told her that she was turning the discipline of the whole school upside down. They were not going to have younger girls behaving impertinently to big girls, and especially to monitors. If she offended in that way again she would be sent to Coventry.'

'Merci pour la langouste !' said Ann. 'What happens there?'

It was explained to her that the monitors were allowed to decree that the whole school should refuse to speak to or hold any communication with a girl who had misbehaved herself, in certain ways that did not actually necessitate reporting her to Miss Sutor. They might carry on this punishment for a week, and if the culprit did not express contrition and a promise of amendment within that time the case then had to be reported to Miss Sutor, who dealt with it.

'But it has never been necessary to send a girl to Coventry for longer than three days,' said Margaret. 'So I should advise you not to force us to do it to you, Ann, for I warn you that you won't like it at all.'

'Oh, I would detest it,' said Ann. 'But *écoutez*, if I told a girl that a spider was mounting to her neck, couldn't she say "Thank you?"'

'You may make fun of it if you like,' said Mabel Finney, who was still indignant at the landing of the frog on her book, 'but you won't make fun of it if we decide to send you to Coventry. I think you ought to be sent there for what you did this morning. A good many people would have been frightened into convulsions by it.'

'Ta bouche, bébé !' said Ann. 'Wouldn't Hilda Lang be permitted to speak to me when we walked home together? How would you know whether she did it or not?'

This was a point that had not yet arisen in practical politics, and Margaret Parbury, to whom the question had been put, with an air of detached interest, hesitated. But Mabel Finney said: 'Any girl who breaks the rules of Coventry is sent to Coventry herself. We all know that you egg on Hilda Lang to follow your bad example and be rude to the elder girls. She behaved very well before you came, and now she's nearly as bad as you are. She had better be careful too, for we are not going to stand any more of it, from either of you.'

'Perhaps I had better go and tell her,' said Ann. 'Thank you very much for explicating things. You will find that I shall make much progress.'

Hilda Lang was not inclined to make light of the punishment of being sent to Coventry, which she had already seen in operation. 'We did it last term to Bertha Mainwaring,' she said. 'We were all pretty sure that she got translations of her Latin from a book in Miss Henderson's room. She was always going there on some excuse, when Miss Henderson was out. She wouldn't confess, and we didn't like to tell Miss Henderson, so we told the monitors, and they sent her to Coventry. She cried all the time, and confessed on the second day.'

'They couldn't make me cry,' said Ann. 'Nobody in this school shall ever see me upset some tears.'

'Oh, indeed, Miss Ann,' put in Lizzie, Ann's maid, under whose escort the two girls went to and from school. 'You needn't make yourself out braver than you are. You cried when you came home from hockey the other afternoon, with that big bruise on your leg.'

Ann turned a scarlet, wrathful face on her. 'How dare you report tales?' she cried. 'I didn't let anybody know I'd been hurt, and I didn't even walk crooked till the school couldn't see me, though it hurt very much.'

'Well, I must say it was a dreadful great bruise,' said Lizzie, 'and it wasn't much you cried. Still, cry you did, and it's no use pretending you didn't.'

'I didn't say I never cried,' said Ann; 'but I shouldn't cry at school, and if I like to cry at home sometimes, that's my affair, and it isn't for you to say anything about it. You can walk behind us. We don't want you mixing yourself in our conversation.'

'Being sent to Coventry is pretty beastly,' said Hilda. 'Still, it might be rather fun if you or I were, because they couldn't do anything to stop us doing or saying what we liked, except when we were actually at school.'

'I don't think I want to taste of it,' said Ann. 'I like them all, truly, except Mabel Finney, who is vindictive. Fancy making all that fuss about a wooden frog!'

III

THE further details that Hilda Lang gave her on the quick reduction to penitence of Bertha Mainwaring, who had left the term before, persuaded Ann that it was worth while to take some trouble to avoid the path that led to Coventry, and she comported herself for the next few weeks in such a way as to give no excuse for despatching her on the journey. She treated the older girls with no particular veneration, but refrained from any serious offence against their dignity; and with her own contemporaries she became highly popular.

It was a much coveted privilege to be invited to tea with Ann. She entertained three or four friends in this way every week, and she was very fair about it, leaving nobody in her class out altogether, although she did not like them all equally.

The girls were first of all introduced to Lady Sinclair,

who was usually to be found after her afternoon drive knitting in a chair by the drawing-room fire. She was a handsome, precise old lady, but always had something to say to Ann's guests that put them at their ease with her. She was evidently extremely fond of her little granddaughter, and it was pretty to see her holding the child's slim figure to her as she talked, or stroking her curly head with her thin old hand, and always taking the opportunity to kiss her as she dismissed them to their entertainment upstairs.

It was generally agreed that Ann behaved beautifully to her. Although she was known to object to promiscuous kissing, she was full of little endearments to her grandmother, and always very careful to see that she was exactly suited in the matter of cushions and footstool before she left her. She never played hockey on Saturday afternoons, because her grandmother liked her to go for a drive with her. The school, walking two and two to the hockey field, would sometimes be passed, but not very quickly, by Lady Sinclair's carriage, in which, seated in state, were the very old lady and the very young one, both beautifully dressed in their respective fashions, and neither of them looking as if she would much prefer to be playing hockey to driving along the sea front at a steady six or seven miles an hour. Ann would turn a bright face towards the serge-coated and skirted line, and wave her neatly gloved hand; and if she wore rather a wistful look when the plump roan horses slowly outdistanced the procession, it did not last long, and her conversation was as gay and as congenial as possible to the old lady, who enjoyed her Saturday afternoon drives more than those of other days in the week.

The only indirect criticism that Ann was ever known to pass upon her grandmother was when she was asked by Gertrude Pilcher, whose favourite form of recreation

was to design fashion-plates, to exhibit some of her clothes. 'Oh, bother clothes!' said Ann. 'I am quite enough occupied by *them*. If you want to see them, Lizzie can show you.'

Gertrude Pilcher, and some others, thought that Ann showed a surprising lack of appreciation of the beautiful things that her grandmother liked to buy for her. They thought that if they had as many new clothes as Ann was always appearing in, and such fine and expensive ones, they would be placed in a continual state of happiness, especially if they showed them off as well as she did. But Ann admitted to Hilda Lang that, although she liked to look nice, the continual tryings on and dressings up were the bane of her existence. If she were only allowed to run about sometimes in old clothes, she could support it better to be so often made to appear *endimanchée*. But she did a good deal of running about none the less, in clothes that if not old were convenient to the purpose, and admitted that perhaps it wasn't very nice of her to grumble, when it pleased Granny so much to buy pretty things for her.

Ann's tea-parties were always prolific of surprise in the way of edibles, although her grandmother's spoiling of her did not reach to the extent of allowing her anything but the plainest food in the ordinary way. All the servants adored Ann, and the cook surpassed herself on these occasions in providing her and her guests with cakes and sweets that were as attractive to the eye as they were to the palate. Ann would go downstairs when the girls had left, to thank her—to those comfortable sacred lower regions to which a visit from above by anybody but Ann would have been considered an unwarrantable intrusion.

'Well, now, honey,' the fat cook would say, 'it's a pleasure to do anything for you, you do thank one so pretty, bless your sweet face! If you liked your tea,

just go and ask her ladyship if you may give us a tune on that there little fiddle of yours.'

So Ann, having obtained leave, would bring down her precious Gagliano, and play to as appreciative an audience as she was ever likely to get anywhere. Besides the cook, there would be the old butler, two middle-aged housemaids, and a young footman of a mere thirty-five or so, who was still considered something of an upstart in this established society. Lady Sinclair's maid would form part of the audience if her duties permitted, and the doors would be left open for the benefit of the kitchen-maid, busy with the first stages of preparing for the ritual of dinner, who, having only about fifteen years service to her credit, had to be kept in her place. Lizzie, as an infant of seventeen, was not encouraged to present herself among her elders except officially, and as she was apt to be severely cross-examined by them when she did so, as to the way she was fulfilling her duties towards her young mistress, she was not anxious to appear when there was no necessity.

To all these middle-aged men and women, whose lives were so comfortable and easy that they were in danger of being stifled by them, the advent of Ann had brought a waft of sweet fresh air, which had the effect of revivifying them, and arousing their atrophied interests in youth and innocence. They were all jealous of Lizzie, who absorbed the bulk of the service necessary to Ann's existence, and they would all put themselves out to do some little thing for her if occasion could be found. The old butler liked to serve her breakfast himself, though he had to get up an hour earlier to do so on the days when she went to school. The footman never made any complaint about carrying up coals to her schoolroom, or suggested that Lizzie should do it herself, and took as much pains with her boots and

shoes as if they were her ladyship's own. Neither of the housemaids would allow Lizzie to 'dō' her rooms entirely.

Ann was merry and friendly with them, but a little stately too, because her grandmother did not like her 'being too much with the servants.' She was very considerate of their feelings, careful of the dignity of their age and long service, and not only never played any of her pranks upon them, but never teased them in a way that might wound their staid vanities. It is true that she made up for this by leading Lizzie 'a regular dance' in the privacy of her own apartments, and that somewhat pert handmaid would say that it beat her altogether how any one who could behave like such a perfect little lady downstairs, to them as did next to nothing for her, should so far demean herself as to do and say the things she did to one who worked her hands to the bone for her from morning till night.

But it will be seen that, with this one regrettable exception, Ann was as good as gold in her grandmother's house, and deserved all the love and attention that was lavished on her. It is only right to point this out, as her behaviour at school was often so much the reverse of exemplary.

IV

As Ann has been shown moving in such a gracious and placid atmosphere at home, it will not throw the picture of her out of balance to recount one or two of her escapades at school, before we return to the episode of Mary Polegate's illuminated chart of the Kings of Juda and Israel, and tell what came of it.

The class-room in which Ann's lessons were mostly done was on the ground floor, and its windows opened

into the garden. One warm spring morning, during the eleven o'clock interval, Hilda Lang dared her to get in at the window instead of through the door, when the bell rang. Ann accepted the challenge. The window was too high to be negotiated easily. Ann did it, at the expense of a clean washing frock, but not quickly enough to escape the notice of Miss Henderson, who walked in at the door just as Ann was scrambling through the window, in a series of postures not the most reticent.

Miss Henderson stood still, and waited until Ann had reached the floor. 'Well, upon my word!' she said coldly. 'That is pretty behaviour for a girl who is supposed to be a lady.' (Miss Henderson was always very strong upon girls being ladies.) 'But it is an exhibition that I regret to say, much as it may surprise you, Ann, I do not appreciate. Perhaps Miss Sutor may regard it in another light. You will go to her at once, just as you are, and see what she says about it. Gertrude Pilcher, you will go with her, and see that she does not do anything on the way to make herself more presentable than she thinks it necessary to appear before me.'

When the two girls were in the passage, Gertrude Pilcher, more harassed in her mind over the damage done to Ann's pretty frock than mindful of the call of honour, said: 'I must just get off the worst, Ann. We can get a brush in the cloak-room. You needn't wash your hands.'

Ann marched straight ahead with her nose in the air and a deep blush overspreading her face. Her indignation upheld her under Miss Sutor's stern rebuke, to which she listened in silence. When it was over, and she was told to go back and apologise to Miss Henderson, she said: 'Miss Henderson told me to come directly to you, just as I was, and then told

Gertrude Pilcher to come with me to see that I didn't arrange myself first.'

Miss Sutor looked at her, not very amiably, for she had been disturbed in a very private hour, and thought that Miss Henderson might have sent Ann to her after school. 'I think it would have been more respectful if you *had* tidied yourself before you came to me,' she said. 'Go and do so before you go back, and then apologise to Miss Henderson as I told you.'

Ann made her curtsey and marched out of the room again, very stiff and offended. She told Gertrude Pilcher that she could brush herself and wash her hands without her assistance, and insisted upon her going back to the classroom. When she was alone in the cloak-room she shed a few angry tears, but dried them immediately for fear of their traces showing. She was misunderstood, her sense of honour repudiated and scorned. Miss Sutor was as bad as Miss Henderson. She would be coldly polite to her in the future, but would show her plainly that she did not consider her a fit person to associate with except on official terms.

But Miss Sutor had already realised that she had made a mistake, and came into the cloak-room to put it right. 'I didn't mean to say just now that you ought to have done what Miss Henderson told you not to, Ann,' she said, 'though I'm afraid that is exactly what I did say. As for sending somebody with you, I don't think she thought at all that you would be likely to do anything dishonourable; but you are so often disobedient, you know, that she might very well think you wouldn't do exactly as you were told. You are not to make a grievance of that, and don't let me have you reporting yourself for misbehaviour any more. It has happened four times already this term, and I have had to talk to you more than to any other girl, though you have been here a shorter time than any of them.'

This put matters a little more right, though not entirely so. Ann did feel that a slur had been cast upon her honour by Miss Henderson, though her child's clean sense of justice allowed its weight to Miss Sutor's way of looking at it. But she did not consider that it need prevent her adding to her apology: 'I would have gone directly to Miss Sutor if you hadn't sent Gertrude Pilcher with me.'

Miss Henderson did better than Miss Sutor, by replying: 'Very well, Ann; another time I shall not send any one with you. But I sincerely hope there will not be another time.'

But unfortunately there was—no later than the following week, and it was again Miss Henderson who sent her to report herself.

The mistresses' table was on a dais, and Ann's desk was in the first row. As Ann was busy with all the rest doing sums, and a deep silence brooded over the room, Hilda Lang, whose desk was next to hers, nudged her and directed her attention to Miss Henderson's feet.

They were rather large, and her shoes were roomy but not elegant. She would have gained no admiration from the mid-Victorian novelists, who went into raptures about a neat little ankle; and what could be seen of her stockings was slightly rucked. But it was not these deficiencies to which Hilda had called attention. Miss Henderson's feet were turned in at an angle of about thirty degrees, with the toes at the apex, and the contrast between what could be seen under the table with the stiff figure and severe face above it was too much for Ann's equanimity. She shook with laughter, which soon became audible. Hilda also laughed, but with more self-control, and when Miss Henderson, roused by the sounds, laid down her book and looked severely to where the laughter was coming from, Hilda's face was quite solemn, while all that

could be seen of Ann was a shock of brown hair bent over the desk, and a pair of thin, shaking shoulders.

'You seem to be highly amused at something, Ann,' said Miss Henderson. 'It seems a pity to keep it to yourself. Please stand up and tell us the joke.'

Ann lifted her head. Miss Henderson had shifted the position of her feet; so she was enabled to reply, with a fairly successful effort at gravity: 'I'm very sorry, Miss Henderson. I won't laugh again.'

But unfortunately, as she dropped her eyes, there was a slight movement of Miss Henderson's feet. They did not return to their former ludicrous position, but the possibility of their doing so was enough to shake Ann with another chuckle.

'I think you had better go and stand in that unoccupied corner until you have collected yourself sufficiently to tell us what it is all about,' said Miss Henderson.

Ann went at once to the corner. It was a position of extreme disgrace, but she was relieved at not being made to disclose the cause of her merriment then and there. Her feelings were too nice to allow of her gaining satisfaction from bringing confusion to Miss Henderson, and she was intent on finding a way out of the difficulty without a sacrifice of truth.

But, presently, the humiliation of being put to stand in a corner, like a baby, began to work on her. She would not actually face the corner, and the girls who threw surreptitious glances at her saw her face gradually darken, while the blush that showed so readily on her fair skin dyed it from temples to neck.

If Miss Henderson could put this gross indignity upon her, there seemed no reason to spare her. It was not long before Ann walked back to her desk and said: 'I am ready to tell you what I was laughing at, Miss Henderson.'

'I didn't tell you to leave the corner,' said Miss Henderson. 'Go back there and tell us the joke. I have no doubt it will amuse us all immensely.'

Ann did not mind the corner as long as she was not expected to face it. 'I was laughing at your feet under the table,' she said, with an expression which indicated that whatever amusement she had gained from the exhibition had by this time evaporated.

Miss Henderson's blushes did not come as readily as Ann's, but she blushed now. 'You are a very rude and impertinent girl,' she said. 'Sit down and go on with your work, and go and report yourself to Miss Sutor immediately after lesson.'

Hilda Lang broke the pause of consternation. 'Please, Miss Henderson, it was I who made her laugh,' she said.

Miss Henderson did not want any further attention drawn to the origin of Ann's laughter, and said: 'She has already told us why she laughed. Go on with your work.'

When calm was restored, Ann pressed Hilda's hand under the desk. It was a great thing to have a friend so ready to stand by you. She would do the same by Hilda, if occasion should ever offer. The thought that she had begun to grow ever so little tired of having Hilda as her chief friend brought her compunction, and distracted her mind from the ordeal before her.

The ordeal was rather a serious one. Ann recounted the episode with conscientious thoroughness, only leaving out the fact that it was Hilda Lang who had initiated it. 'I couldn't help laughing,' she said, 'because it looked so funny; but I didn't want Miss Henderson to know why I was laughing, and if she hadn't made me stand up in the corner I should have tried not to tell her.'

'That means that you lost your temper and were rude,' said Miss Sutor, '—and rude in a way that I

will not permit girls to be in my school. I'm afraid that you are becoming a thoroughly troublesome child, Ann. I talked to you only a few days ago, and yet here you are again! Now I am going to say this to you: I have never cared to have day-pupils here, and I have made very few exceptions to that rule. I took you because I have known your grandmother for many years and have the highest respect for her. But if you are going to misbehave yourself constantly, and upset the whole school in the way you do, I shall have to ask her to send you somewhere else, and tell her very plainly why.'

This was much worse than anything that Ann had anticipated. She turned a white face upon Miss Sutor, and said: 'Oh, please don't tell Granny. I will promise faithfully to be good if you won't.'

Miss Sutor was rather disconcerted by her sudden pallor, which came as readily to her face as the blushes, and a little touched by her cry of distress. Ann was such a child in some ways, though advanced in others. But she took advantage of the impression she had created. 'I shall not do so unless I am obliged,' she said, 'but if you are told to report yourself to me any more I shall certainly speak to Lady Sinclair about you. It will rest entirely with yourself; so you had better make up your mind to behave properly for the rest of the term. This is the last time I shall speak to you without taking further steps. You will apologise to Miss Henderson for your rudeness. There is no regular system of punishment here: I pride myself upon having girls who do not need it. But I cannot overlook your continual naughtiness. I shall not allow any one to come to tea with you next Saturday.'

Ann hung her head. If she did not have any one to tea with her, Granny would have to know it, and she would ask why. She was just about to put in a plea for

another form of punishment, when she remembered that she was probably to be taken up to London on the next Saturday, and so Granny need know nothing about it.

The thought brought immense relief, but only for a moment. Her code forbade her to take advantage of the accident.

'Now go,' said Miss Sutor.

'I wasn't going to ask anybody to tea next Saturday,' said Ann. 'I think I am going on a visit to London.'

Miss Sutor threw a glance at her. Her face had recovered its normal hue, but she looked very unhappy. 'Well, as you have told me that,' she said, 'and I don't want your grandmother to know about my having to punish you, I will let you off this time. Now go to Miss Henderson.'

Ann was very subdued as she went back to the classroom, where Miss Henderson was correcting exercises. She felt that she had had a narrow escape, and must really be considerably naughtier by nature than she had any conscious inclination to be, since her naughtiness might bring her into such dreadful disgrace if it were not amended. She made up her mind that it should be. She could have heaps of fun at school without playing silly pranks, and if she felt over-inclined to break the bounds of careful behaviour she could always do so at home with Lizzie, who would threaten to tell Granny, but would never do so.

Her apology to Miss Henderson was so evidently sincere that that lady had no difficulty in accepting it. 'I'm afraid I did lose my temper at being put into the corner,' said Ann, 'and I am very sorry for that. I know I have a hasty temper. I truly do try to control it, Miss Henderson, but it is very difficult, and I don't always arrive. This time, it made me say something I didn't want to say at all. You understand, it wasn't truly you I was laughing at.'

'I thought you said it was,' said Miss Henderson dryly.

'No. I wish you would let me show you what it looks like from my desk to see somebody sitting at your table turning their toes—er—rather inside. I think you would see at once that one might laugh without even thinking whose toes they were.'

Miss Henderson was not without a sense of humour, and had a considerably warmer liking for Ann than Ann had any idea of. 'Very well,' she said. 'You shall give me an exhibition of what I looked like.'

She took her seat at Ann's desk, and Ann hers at the table. 'Of course I shan't be trying to imitate *you* in particular,' Ann explained, somewhat anxiously. 'I shouldn't like you to think that of me. As I made you remark, it might be anybody.'

'Very well,' said Miss Henderson.

'I am forced to take up a book, just to show that looking serious on the top makes a difference.'

'Very well.'

Ann sat very stiff and upright in Miss Henderson's chair and arranged her feet at an angle not too extravagantly obtuse, out of consideration for Miss Henderson's feelings. Her slim black-stockinged legs and her neat little house-shoes bore no remarkable resemblance to anything that Miss Henderson had unwittingly displayed, but there was something very funny about the severe air with which she regarded the book in front of her, while she managed to convey into her attitude a sort of apology for anything in it that might appear to be a caricature of Miss Henderson.

Miss Henderson, sitting at Ann's desk, laughed spontaneously. 'Yes, I quite see now,' she said. 'As you say, anybody might sit like that, but *I* ought not to, as I am always telling girls to hold themselves properly'—Miss Henderson was gym mistress—and

now that I have seen what it looks like I shall endeavour not to do it again. I should not have told you to stand in the corner, Ann, if I had known what excuse there was for you.'

So Ann got over that little trouble, and made up her mind that the rest of the term should find her blameless.

V

THE term neared its end; so did Mary Polegate's illuminated list of the Kings of Juda and Israel, to which we shall come in a moment. Miss Sutor's birthday would fall in the last week but one, and it was always made a great occasion of. Besides, the offering the girls would subscribe for and present to her in the morning, there was to be a concert in the evening, with a supper afterwards. The girls were to provide the supper, and Miss Sutor was to be their guest. The arrangements gave them a great deal to talk about during the latter part of the term, and Ann was as interested as anybody.

Ann was to play two pieces in the concert. Other girls played the violin, but none of them as well as she did. The old French *chef d'orchestre*, who was spending the evening of his life with his English-married daughter, and taught at Miss Sutor's school chiefly to give himself some occupation, had opened his eyes when he had first heard Ann play. But he had been more severe with her than with his other more ordinary pupils, and had hardly ever given her any praise. Ann thought him a horrid old creature, but worked hard to satisfy him, and there were times when she played to him in such a way that he had hard work to hold himself back from showing his pleasure by an ecstatic embrace,

which would have surprised Ann intensely and offended her not a little.

As this was to be a very special concert, it was agreed by the girls that the respective music masters and mistresses should nominate the performers; then no one could be offended at being left out. M. Lanson put down Edith Mackenzie, a competent performer, for one piece, and Ann for two, leaving the others out altogether. As three of the rejected were 'big girls,' there was some little feeling about this; but it had been agreed that there was to be no jealousy over the decisions, and Ann was really so very nice about it, even to the extent of braving the autocrat's wrath and suggesting that one of her pieces should be replaced by another performer's, that, although her proposal was rejected with sarcastic ignominy, no blame could attach to her for being singled out in a way that no other girl in the school was.

Things were going extremely well for Ann. She was behaving herself with such perfect propriety during school hours that the shadow of her former misdemeanours was fast lifting from her, and Miss Sutor had once or twice shown her, in some indefinable way she had at command, that she was pleased with her. Ann had never liked Miss Sutor very much. She thought she had been a little unfair to her in both her recent 'talkings to.' Miss Henderson, whom it was not the fashion to like as much as Miss Sutor, had really understood her better on both occasions, although she had been the offended party. But now she felt that any slight coldness there might have been between Miss Sutor and herself had entirely melted away. She was caught in the fervour of appreciation that Miss Sutor's approaching birthday had aroused towards her, and was as anxious as anybody to show it, by helping to arrange the series of pleasant surprises that filled the minds of the whole school.

But although Ann's behaviour in school removed her far from the possibility of official rebuke, she showed a slight tendency to revert to her early habit of 'cheeking' the older girls. It was no more than kittenish playfulness, induced by the high spirits which her unspotted conscience encouraged in her, and in most schools would have been considered quite harmless, if not rather agreeable from a child of such gaiety and humour as Ann, who, in her most audacious moods, never did or said anything that could hurt any one's feelings. But the tradition of patronage on the one side and dependence on the other, existed in Miss Sutor's school, and Ann's fault was that she did not observe it.

Mary Polegate had arrived, by unremitting pains and a considerable expenditure of the best illuminating colours, at King Pekahiah. The border round the chart was already finished, and she only had to add the names of the remaining kings before the whole work of art would be ready as a supplementary birthday present to Miss Sutor, from one of her most exemplary pupils. The performance, it must be admitted, was not up to the desire of the performer, but Mary Polegate had no idea of any deficiencies in it, and would frequently put her head on one side to regard her handiwork with a look of such bland satisfaction that nobody would have had the heart to undeceive her.

Ann would certainly have been the last to do so, but she fell into the way of teasing her as the work neared its completion, and urging her to be extremely careful that no mistakes crept into it at the last moment.

'What should you do if you found you had illuminated Manasseh with two n's instead of one?' 'What should you do if you had employed all your gold, and had no money to buy any more?' 'Why didn't you finish the

names before you began the border? I'm afraid these names began to tap upon your system, and to say true they do look rather silly. Fancy christening a baby Pekahiah! I suppose he had to be a baby once.'

These were a few of Ann's irritating remarks, which Mary Polegate received patiently enough, except when they seemed to be bordering on the profane, like the last one, when she would rebuke Ann, and remind her gently that what she was doing was taken from the Bible. She only expressed herself more strongly when Ann asked her: 'What should you do if I were to upset a drop of ink in the middle of it?' Then she said warmly: 'If you were to do a thing like that, Ann, I should think you were not only troublesome but really wicked. I wish you would go away and leave me alone. It is no pleasure to me to have you looking on, as you can only make silly remarks.'

The next day, Ann was taken aside by Hilda Strangways, who told her that she knew she didn't mean to be unkind and it was only in fun, but she was spoiling some of Mary's pleasure in the work that she had taken so long to do, and it would be kinder if she were not to tease her any more.

Hilda Strangways was a bright pretty girl of seventeen, for whom Ann had come to cherish a 'secret pash,' although she had not even admitted it to the other Hilda, of whom once more she was getting rather tired as a chief friend. Hilda Lang was merry and volatile; Hilda Strangways was merry in a way that seemed to Ann much more admirable, for she could be sensible too, and could laugh and joke with younger girls than herself, without the patronage that usually went along with such unbending. Ann would have given a good deal to ask her to tea, but she knew that if she did so she would be accused of making up to her, and her reputation for independence would be gone.

Ann was secretly enchanted at being appealed to in this way, and was quite prepared to give up from that moment all teasing of Mary Polegate. But the terms she had laid down for herself for her intercourse with Hilda Strangways were such that she must discuss the matter with her as an equal, and not appear, even with her, to be giving obedience. This was Ann's pride, and she had reason to regret it afterwards, especially as it would have been grateful to her feelings to give in at once to Hilda, who had spoken to her so nicely.

'It's all so silly,' she said. 'As if Miss Sutor wanted a thing like that! I think it does her good to be teased about it.'

'Perhaps it is rather silly,' said the older girl. 'But we don't want Mary to know that anybody thinks so, do we? Of course I know you wouldn't really spill ink over it, or do anything to spoil it, but I think she's rather afraid that you might, after what you said yesterday. So just promise me that you won't, and I'll tell her.'

It must have been some perversity that caused Ann to reply: 'I can't promise that, because I might want to'; for she was ready to agree to anything, now that she had exercised her complete independence of attitude.

She would have laughed and given the promise in the next breath, but Hilda said: 'I don't think it's much for one friend to ask of another, Ann, but if you won't, you won't. I'm sorry I said anything to you about it.' Then she left her.

Ann was inclined to call after her with a complete capitulation, but partly her pride prevented her, and partly it caused her a half sweet half painful thrill to have a misunderstanding with Hilda that could be cleared up at any moment she wished.

Her nature was too direct to allow her to take pleasure in such a feeling for long, and she made tentative advances to Hilda with a view of putting things right. But Hilda was offended with her, and when the advances were received coldly she did not persist in them. A spirit of perversity seized her again, and she teased Mary Polegate about her illuminated chart of the Kings of Juda and Israel persistently, and in Hilda's hearing. After that, of course, Hilda would take no more notice of her, and Ann felt very miserable, but went on with the teasing the next morning.

When she and the other Hilda walked home from morning school—this was on Friday—she covered Mary Polegate's efforts with still further ridicule, and the other Hilda followed her lead and said that she wished Ann *would* drop some ink on the silly old chart, and put an end to it once for all. Ann said she had a good mind to do so, if only to show Hilda Strangways that she was not going to be ordered about by the older girls. She felt a sharp pang as she said this. If Hilda Strangways had been walking with her at that moment instead of Hilda Lang, she would have recanted the speech instantly and all that led up to it. But Hilda Strangways was not there, and so strange are the ways of humankind that, although Ann refrained that afternoon from goading the meek Mary Polegate any further, she would not take the definite steps that would have ended the affair altogether.

There were opportunities for doing so, for she and Hilda Lang stayed to tea at the school, and there were leisure times, as well as work to be done. She did just once put herself in Hilda Strangway's path, and gave her a look that meant: 'I'm sorry.' But Hilda seemed not to notice it, and the opportunity for reconciliation passed.

VI

WHEN Ann and Hilda Lang left the school, Hilda was bubbling over with foolish excitement, and made a mystery of the cause. Ann was far too unhappy to fall in with this mood, and said testily: 'Oh, do say what you are giggling about, and don't go on like that.'

'Oh, my dear,' said Hilda, 'it's such fun! You know Mary Polegate hasn't quite finished the names of her kings. Well, when you were all sewing I got hold of her old chart, and put William the Conqueror and William Rufus in two of the places she had left.'

Ann stopped short on the pavement. Her face was quite white. 'You didn't!' she exclaimed.

Hilda was slightly sobered by her look. 'Only in pencil,' she said. 'She can rub it out again.'

'Then I think you're the biggest *beast* I ever saw,' said Ann, with angry vehemence. 'How *dare* you do a thing like that?'

There followed a considerable commotion. They had come out from the quiet road in which 'The Cedars' was situated, and there were people within sight and hearing of them. Lizzie was scandalised at the idea of a disturbance in so public a place, and adjured Ann by threats of telling her ladyship for goodness' sake to be'ave herself.

Ann took no notice of her, but stood where she was, and abused Hilda in no measured terms, using French in the higher flights, but making very good practice with English too. Hilda, greatly upset by this turning on her on the part of her best friend, defended herself almost as vehemently. At last, when a boy with a basket stopped to listen and to laugh at them, Ann was brought to her senses, and walked on, the others with her.

'Reely!' exclaimed the outraged Lizzie. 'I *shall* tell her ladyship this time, Miss Ann, and you won't persuade me not to. Such *disgraceful* be'aviour on the part of a young lady I never——'

'Fiche moi la paix!' Ann snapped at her. 'I'll occupy myself with you afterwards. Walk behind us.'

Lizzie, strong in her position of right, refused to do this, but subsided into scandalised silence, broken by occasional expostulations, of which Ann took no further notice.

'It isn't half as bad as spilling ink on her chart,' complained Hilda, 'and you said only this morning that you would do that.'

'Bécasse!' said Ann. 'Of course I didn't mean it. Only a *fool* would have thought I did. I think her chart is silly, and *she's* silly, and fatiguing about it. But it's a *shame* to spoil it, when she's so proud of it and has worked at it for so long. I say it's a *beastly* thing to do.' (Expostulations from Lizzie.) 'I'm ashamed for *you*, Hilda Lang, and you ought to be ashamed for yourself.'

'You're just as bad as I am,' said Hilda. 'I don't believe you wouldn't have done something to it if I hadn't. It's all very well to talk now as if you were a saint on earth.'

The quarrel raged hotly again. Lizzie said that if they didn't stop it instantly she should tell her ladyship the very moment they got home.

Presently they became quieter. 'The girls will send you to Coventry when they find it out,' said Ann.

Hilda blenched. She now wished very much that she had not been so thoughtless, although she had hotly repudiated all Ann's charges. 'She can quite easily rub it out,' she said. 'And I shall say I'm sorry.'

'So you ought to be,' said Ann.

Slight recrudescence of recrimination, and statement

from Lizzie that she had made up her mind, and tell her ladyship this time she *should*.

'If they do send me to Coventry,' said Hilda, who, while putting up a stout fight, had gradually been brought under, 'I suppose you wouldn't speak to me either.'

'As we *have* been friends,' said Ann, with emphasis, 'I should naturally go to Coventry with you. But all the same I should blame you just as much as the others.'

'At any rate, I should never have done it except for what you said.'

Ann felt this to be true. 'Perhaps I should merit it as much as you,' she said, 'especially as you're so feeble that if I were to put *any* silliness into your head you would go and do it, and I ought to have known that.'

Expiring flickers of the quarrel, and final statement from Lizzie that Miss Ann had brought it on herself now, and told her ladyship *should be*.

But by this time consequences were beginning to weigh too heavily on both girls to admit of any satisfaction from mere recrimination. It may be allowed to speak well for Ann that hitherto she had felt nothing but indignation for the baseness of Hilda's deed. She felt as sorry for Mary Polegate as if she were one of that meek character's warmest admirers and had never teased her on her own account. But now the consequences as they would affect herself began to obtrude themselves upon her notice, and they were seen to be as serious as possible.

It was not, however, until she had taken a very strained leave of Hilda, and had turned her attention to Lizzie, so far as to relieve herself of the embarrassment of having anything said to her grandmother about the late occurrences, that her mind was at liberty to take in all the probabilities of the situation.

Hilda would confess and express contrition, but not

until Monday morning, and from the moment her unwarranted addition to the chart was discovered—it was almost certainly known to the whole school already—Ann would be under conviction of at least sympathising, if not of aiding and abetting her.

As she was dressing to go down to dessert with her grandmother—Lizzie, who was helping her, having been ordered to keep silence, so that she might occupy herself with her thoughts—a still more awful consideration occurred to her, and sent the blood rushing from her face, so that she became first as red as Mary Polegate's vermilion, and then as white as the paper to which it was applied.

Until Hilda confessed on Monday morning, it would be thought that Ann had done the deed herself.

VII

THERE could be no doubt about this. Ann wondered that it had not occurred to her before. Hilda had taken a very small part in teasing Mary Polegate compared with hers, and the few things she had said had been so imitative of Ann, whom she had always followed, that it would occur to nobody that she had for once initiated something of her own.

It would not have been so bad if there were going to be the usual tea party on Saturday afternoon. Hilda would have come to it, and the other girls who would also have come would have taken back to school the true account of what had happened. But a party of relations was coming down to see Granny on Saturday morning, and were going to stay until Sunday afternoon. Ann's guests had been put off until the following Saturday, which would also be the occasion of Miss Sutor's birthday concert and supper.

Ann thought of going to see Hilda the next morning, and asking her to put matters right before going back to school on Monday. But the terms on which they had parted made her unwilling to ask anything of her, and besides, on thinking it over, her pride rose against saying or doing anything that would look like sheltering herself behind Hilda. It would be worse for Hilda than it would be for her when the truth came to be known, and she must take what was being said about her as a punishment for her part in the affair, which she was quite ready to admit was not small.

But it was hard to bear. Her heart failed her when she thought of what Hilda Strangways must be thinking of her, and must continue to think for more than two whole days longer. She had gained some consolation during the afternoon, hoping that Hilda would notice that she had left off teasing Mary Polegate, and might even divine that she was sorry for what had gone before. But now, of course, she could only think that Ann had gone to all lengths to spite her; and how she must despise a girl who could do a thing like that, and for such a purpose, when she had only given her the advice of a friend! 'It's not much for one friend to ask of another, Ann,' she had said. It was doubtful whether she would ever look upon Ann as a friend again, even when she should come to know that she was not quite so bad as she now seemed to be.

The next morning a bevy of aunts and uncles and cousins came down in time for luncheon. Lady Sinclair liked to fill her large house with guests on occasions, when she felt well enough to enjoy their society, and to live very quietly for the rest of the time.

How Ann would have enjoyed that Saturday and Sunday, if they had only come the week before! She was made an immense deal of. She was the only child of her generation among a large number of Sinclair

relations. All these kind, merry uncles and aunts and cousins lavished affection and admiration upon her. The presents they had brought down for her would have been handsome for a birthday and Christmas combined. The girl cousins vied for private possession of her at all times of their visit; the uncles and aunts affected to quarrel among themselves as to who should have her to sit by them at meal-times; they amused themselves in no way without reference to her; and even the uncles went to church on Sunday morning for the pleasure of walking there and back with Ann between them, who, in a frock of vieux rose taffeta, with a hat tied under her chin with narrow black velvet, and her thin legs encased in the finest of silk stockings, was a figure whom the smartest of men might have been proud to escort. She dined downstairs on Saturday night and played to them afterwards, and when she went to bed they talked about her until they went to bed themselves.

It was not in the nature of things that Ann should not often forget her troubles in the excitement and pleasures of those two days. It was only when she was left alone in bed, after both the aunts and all the cousins had stolen in for a last look at her, and been surprised to find her still awake, that the contrast between what they thought of her and what they were thinking of her at the school came to her so mournfully.

She had flashes of apparently the most light-hearted gaiety, which enchanted her admiring relations, but for the most part she was quieter than her wont, and more clinging in her affection than they were accustomed to find her. Her pretty girl cousins had always thought her rather too cool in her reception of their petting, even when she had been much smaller; but now she seemed to like to sit on their knees, although she *was* thirteen, and snuggle up to them, without talking much,

and they found her all the more entrancing, as these quiet moods alternated with her laughter and her audacious sallies. But Ann, who had always disdained petting, found it comforting now, and was glad for once that people always wanted to treat her as if she were much younger than she was.

It would not be petting that would be offered to her when she went back to school on Monday morning.

Lady Sinclair's seat in church was rather in advance of those occupied by Miss Sutor's girls, on the other side of the aisle. If Ann and her grandmother arrived first in church, there was always a sense of greeting as they passed the school pews, although no eyes met and no smiles passed. But this morning, as Ann and her uncles walked up the aisle, it was made evident that, although the whole school was intensely aware of her arrival, the current of sympathy was entirely cut off.

There was no room for them in Lady Sinclair's pew, nor in the one of which she sometimes made use behind it, and they came back to one immediately in front of the school. As Ann passed into it she was aware of all the eyes that were fixed upon her, but only sought those of Hilda Strangways, who was in the front row. Her own were ready with a plea for forgiveness and a suspension of judgment, which she thought Hilda *must* understand somehow, though by words she could tell her nothing. But Hilda, out of all the rows of girls, seemed to be taking no interest in Ann's advent, nor even in that of her two handsome elderly uncles. She sat looking straight in front of her, and her face was quite cold.

Ann's uncles occupied themselves with her during the service in a way that was somewhat embarrassing. One of them, who was a distinguished general, offered to find the places in her prayer-book for her, and the other, who was known for the vitriolic quality of his

speeches in the House of Lords, asked her if she would like to have her hat off, and go to sleep on his shoulder during the sermon. Both of them looked down at her frequently as she stood or sat between them, and bent towards her to whisper little remarks. She wished they wouldn't, but it was some comfort too, with the never-absent consciousness of all that mass of disapproval behind her, to have it made so plain that there were those who appreciated her, even if they did seem to think that she was an infant in arms.

She hung upon the necks of her relations as she bade them good-bye at the station, to which she had been allowed to go so that they might have her with them to the very end. She knew that the moment they had departed black thoughts would settle on her, and the thoughts were very black when she had waved them all off, and was driving back home, seated alone in state in the carriage.

But they were light compared with those that seized upon her when she reached home, and was told the news brought by Dr Lang, who had been paying Lady Sinclair a visit in the interval.

Hilda had contracted tonsillitis the day before, and would not be able to go back to school for at least a week.

VIII

ANN had to be at school at least a quarter of an hour before lessons began on Monday mornings. When she arrived, she lingered at the door, to turn herself round and ask Lizzie if she looked all right; and when Lizzie, somewhat surprised at the question, gave her skirt a twitch and answered in the affirmative, she still lingered, and said: 'Well, don't be late in coming to fetch me.

It's rather agreeable to have a little walk by ourselves sometimes, isn't it?'

Lizzie went away, saying to herself that really Miss Ann could be very sweet when she liked, and no wonder everybody took to her; while Ann, with a look at her walking back to the serenity of home, went into the cloak-room.

There was a small girl waiting for her there, who said, as if she were repeating a lesson: 'Ann Sinclair, you are to go to the monitors in Room B directly you have taken your things off.'

'Qu'est ce que je vais prendre pour mon rhume?' said Ann, who had discovered that it flustered small girls to be addressed in French, which they were supposed to understand, and usually didn't.

But this one was an exception. 'It isn't about your *cold* that they want to see you,' she said, and stood ready to be asked further questions.

'A la gare, à la gare!' said Ann, and the small girl marched off with her nose in the air.

Ann, after making a somewhat more careful toilet than was usual, or even necessary, followed her. She looked in the glass, and found herself paler than she could have wished. So she rubbed her cheeks smartly, and then went upstairs to Room B on the first floor.

All the girls in the school seemed to be in the passages or on the stairs, or at the doors of the class-rooms. In spite of the rubbing, Ann's colour came and went as she passed them, but she greeted them with smiling affability, and did not appear to notice that none of her greetings were returned. She caught her breath once as she came to the door, but opened it and went in without hesitation, and was smiling sweetly when she shut it on the other side, and said: 'Bonjour, Mesdemoiselles!'

The six monitors were seated round the table in the

middle of the room, and there was a vacant chair at the bottom of it.

'Please sit down there,' said Margaret Parbury.

'Thank you. How polite you are!' said Ann, rather glad to take the chair, as her knees were trembling a little, quite against her will.

'I suppose you know what we have sent for you for,' said Margaret Parbury.

'I can't think,' said Ann brightly, 'unless it is to tell me how *chic* you thought my new costume yesterday. One of my parents sent it over from Paris. Didn't you find that it was *un peu là*?'

Margaret Parbury flushed. 'You have played a very mean, unkind trick,' she said. 'We thought perhaps you had done it thoughtlessly and would be sorry for it, as you have had more than two days to think it over. But it seems you can only be impertinent.'

'William the Conqueror, ten sixty six, William Rufus, ten eighty seven,' said Ann, and laughed with great enjoyment, but on a note that seemed to her own fine ear a shade flat.

'I should send her to Coventry at once, and not waste any more time over her,' said Mabel Finney. 'She has no nice feelings and no sense of shame.'

'La barbe!' said Ann, lightly brushing her cheek with the back of her hand.

'Listen,' said Margaret. 'You know as well as we do how cruel you have been. Mary Polegate has been working hard at her illumination for two whole terms, and had nearly finished it; and you wantonly spoilt it for her. Don't you think that's something to be ashamed of, even if you didn't think of what you were doing?'

'Que de chi-chi pour des prunes!' said Ann, with a trifle of impatience, as if she had only just woke up to the fact that the matter was being taken seriously.

'You call me here to make me a sermon, and yet you all laughed, *à gorge déployée*, when you saw the English names.'

'I dare say it's very clever to use French words when English will do,' said Susan Norris. 'But there's no need to be *affected* as well as impudent.'

'It would be affected if *you* were to use French words,' said Ann, 'and I don't suppose you'd say them justly. But I'm half French, and it is natural to me.'

Margaret leaned forward again. 'Ann Sinclair,' she began.

'My name is Marie Germaine Félicité Ann-spelt-in-the-English-fashion Sinclair, if you *must* have it all.'

'We are going to give you one more chance. It was Mary, whom you have treated so badly who begged us to. I think *that* ought to make you sorry for what you have done. If you say you are sorry, and beg her pardon, she will forgive you.'

Ann reflected over this. There would be no difficulty in saying she was sorry the deed was done, if she could avoid saying that she had done it. She had not thought of this before, or she might have met the opening of the proceedings in a different spirit.

But this small hope of a happy issue out of all her afflictions was immediately reft from her.

'We are willing to give you till eleven o'clock to think it over,' said Margaret, who had noticed her hesitation. 'Then, if you have come to your senses, you must sign this paper, and we shall show it to all the girls in the school.'

Ann took the paper, and read it through. It was very stiff and formal, and fixed the deed upon her without any chance of misunderstanding. 'Why would you make me sign this?' she asked.

'Because the whole school knows what you have done, and the whole school must know that you are

sorry for it, if you *are* sorry, as I hope you will be when you have thought it over.'

'Mais c'est humiliant pour moi !' said Ann, seeking to gain a little time.

'You *ought* to be humiliated,' said Rosamund Felstead, who was gratified at having understood the expression, so many of Ann's speeches not squaring with Ollendorf, nor even with Larousse. 'You have done a very wicked thing. We all think it is wonderfully kind and forgiving of Mary not to want you to be punished for it.'

'I would forgive her readily if she would only say she was sorry,' said good Mary Polegate.

'Will you be content if I say I am sorry her illumination is spoilt?' asked Ann.

There had been some discussion as to the paper, and if Mary Polegate, with whom the decision seemed to rest, had said that she was willing to accept the apology suggested, the signing would probably not have been insisted upon. There was something appealing about Ann as she made the suggestion, that seemed to contradict her audacious speech and attitude, and to show that she really was sorry, although she found it difficult to say so.

But Mary Polegate sat there looking meek and forgiving, and said nothing. After a little pause, Margaret Parbury said: 'We have decided you must sign the paper. And we will give you till eleven o'clock to think it over.'

Ann shrugged her shoulders. There was no way out. 'Must I ask Miss Henderson if I can think it over, when I ought to be doing lessons?' she asked. 'She might not like it.'

There was no doing anything with a girl like this. Matters must take their course. 'Are you going to sign the paper or not?' asked Margaret.

'I thought you said you would give me till eleven o'clock to think it over.'

'Oh, it's no good talking to her any more,' said Mabel Finney. 'She can only be abominably rude. She has no sense of shame whatever.'

'It is nearly school time. Send her to Coventry, and see how she likes that,' said Rosamund Felstead.

There was a murmur of acquiescence. Ann rose. 'I'm afraid I must leave you,' she said politely. 'Arrange all that between yourselves. I'm not going to sign your silly old paper, which otherwise has enormous faults of grammar. I know the pencil marks are rubbed out already, and the chart isn't spoilt at all. You wish to take some airs over me, *et ça prends pas*. Au r'voir, Mesdemoiselles !'

IX

THE decree of Coventry was to have been pronounced with due weight, and its full effects once more explained to Ann. But her unceremonious departure had spoilt the solemnity. The monitors, left sitting at the table, looked at one another. Nora O'Brien, who had not yet spoken, laughed.

'It's no laughing matter,' said Mabel Finney. 'I never thought she would be as bad as that, and Miss Sutor doesn't like us to send girls to Coventry unless there's a very good reason for it.'

'Oh, there's a good enough reason,' said Nora. 'I only laughed because she was rather funny.'

Time was getting on, and a decision had to be made at once. Ann's last impertinence showed that it was of no use putting it off, for another attempt to work on her feelings. A monitor went to each room, and announced that Ann Sinclair had been sent to Coventry.

In the meantime, Ann had run downstairs and burst into the room where all the girls of her class were collected. She was in for it now, and for the moment she felt rather exhilarated. During that dreadful Sunday evening, when she had sat in the drawing-room with a book on her knee, and Granny, tired with her exertions, had dozed in her chair, she had thought it all out.

The best of what she had imagined had not happened, but neither had the worst. The best would have been that Hilda Lang would realise, as she herself had done, that if Ann went back to school alone on Monday morning, she would be bound to be blamed for what Hilda had done. She might have sent a message, taking the chief blame on her own shoulders. Ann had known that she would do that if she thought of it, but there had not been much hope that she would think of it; her deficiencies were too apparent.

The worst would have been that Miss Sutor would be told, instead of the supposed culprit being sent to Coventry. In that case, the fearful threat of telling Granny of all her misdemeanours, and asking her to send Ann to another school, would be carried out. She could not make up her mind what she should do in that event; but at least she would not say: 'I didn't do it; Hilda Lang did,' until the worst should happen. And, of course, only to say: 'I didn't do it,' would be the same thing, as the blame would instantly be fastened upon Hilda, and by her.

The only way would be to goad the monitors into sending her to Coventry, in which case Miss Sutor would know nothing until the week was up. She thought she could support that until Hilda Lang returned to school, especially as all the girls would be sorry that they had done it when the truth came out, and would make up to her for any inconveniences to which they had

subjected her. And she would then put it to them, that as she had taken a handsome punishment for Hilda's fault, and Hilda was already sorry for what she had done, the affair might be considered at an end.

What weighed on her chiefly was that she must so act as to make them all think that she had done the thing which she had excoriated Hilda Lang for doing, and especially that Hilda Strangways would believe that she had done it. She was very glad that Hilda Strangways was not a monitor. In that case it would have been very difficult to keep it up. But it would be bad enough in any case, with Hilda.

Ann went into the class-room laughing. She had established a considerable ascendancy over her immediate companions, and some of them had seemed ready to follow her lead in breaking loose from the subjection in which the younger girls of the school were expected to live with regard to the elder. 'I've had such fun with them,' she said, 'and I came away from them before they had finished.'

There was a pause. 'Didn't you say you were sorry?' asked some one.

'I said I would say that I was sorry that her old chart was spoilt, if it truly is. But I don't believe it is, because she sat there, *comme un chien de faïence*, and didn't look as if she would have to begin it all over again. I wouldn't sign their silly old paper.'

'The chart is spoilt,' said Helen Webster, who, until Ann's arrival, had been the leading spirit of the class. 'It was too bad to do it in red and blue pencil, which can't be rubbed out so as not to show.'

Ann's heart sank. This was worse than she had thought, and probably worse than foolish Hilda had thought either. 'It had to be made to look like the rest,' she said.

They didn't know what to say. They had come to

think that it was altogether too bad of Ann to have done what they thought she had, and there was some excitement in the idea of her being sent to Coventry. They wanted to see what she would do. On the other hand, they were indebted to her for many benefits, and while they sympathised with Mary Polegate in the spoiling of her precious chart, they knew that a less serious view would have been taken of the offence if it had not been committed against a monitor. Part of Ann's punishment would be put to that account, in which their sympathies need not be entirely against her.

'Didn't they send you to Coventry, then?' asked Helen Webster.

'Oh, I don't know. There was such a lot of *brouhaha* about it that I didn't stop to find out. I said good-bye, and left them planted there.'

Mabel Finney came into the room. 'Ann Sinclair is sent to Coventry,' she said. 'Nobody is to speak to her, or have anything to do with her, except when it is absolutely necessary in lesson times, until she is ready to apologise humbly for what she did to Mary Polegate, and for being rude to the monitors.'

'Humbly' was her own amendment to the formal message, but she had never forgotten the wooden frog.

She turned to leave the room, amidst complete silence. 'Your safety pin's showing under your belt,' said Ann, and her exit was somewhat spoilt by the motion she made to correct the lapse thus pointed out.

Perhaps if Ann had had a few minutes in which to make her impression, the girls of her class might have rebelled against the decision announced to them. But Miss Henderson coming in at that moment, they had to hurry to their seats. Ann's was at the end of a row, and Hilda Lang's next to it was empty, which created an effect of isolation in itself. There was no one bold enough to take the definite step of showing that she

intended to disregard the decree, and so giving a lead to the rest. During the two hours of varied work, there were opportunities of withholding intercourse from Ann, and they were taken. Tradition was too strong to be broken, and by the time the eleven o'clock interval came, it was well understood throughout the class that Ann was already in Coventry.

Ann talked brightly to every one with whom she came in contact as all the girls of the school trooped into the cloak-room, where glasses of hot and cold milk and buns and biscuits were set out, but they all fell away from her or turned their backs, and she had to give that up, and pretend that she hadn't noticed, while they fell into groups, and discussed her in low voices.

The cloak-room opened into the garden, and Ann planted herself in the doorway, with her glass of milk and her bun, her legs well stuck out so that everybody who passed in and out had to step carefully over her feet or as carefully avoid them. She apologised profusely for the inconvenience she was causing, whenever it was brought to her notice, and as she always happened to be looking out into the garden if any one wanted to go out, and into the room if they wanted to come in, she was apologising nearly all the time. But it was a one-sided joke, and when she saw Hilda Strangways approaching from the garden, towards the end of the interval, she gave it up, and moved away from the door.

Hilda was talking to Margaret Parbury, about Ann's wickedness, of course. Nobody was talking about anything else. Ann would have liked to hear what she was saying. As she came into the room, where Ann was now standing against the wall, she looked at her. Her look was grave enough, but it was not cold, as it had been when she had looked past her in church. The

ready blush flooded Ann's face as she met it. Hilda looked away, as if she could not understand her.

By the end of the morning Ann felt that she had had enough of fighting the whole school for the time being. 'Now don't ask me to talk to you, girls,' she said, as the mistress who had taken the last lesson left the room. 'You are all so stupid this morning that I prefer not to waste my conversation. Don't interrupt me while I'm occupied.'

This allowed her to do what she had to do in a silence that had the effect of being of her own making, until she could go down and join Lizzie in the cloak-room.

X

ANN's first engagement in the afternoon was a violin lesson. She could be as dull as she liked there, and she was very dull, so that M. Lanson stormed at her, and told her that she was a disgrace to his teaching. His annoyance was rather a relief. She spoke to him in English, which he hated, from her. At the end of the lesson, he relented, and said: 'Tu n'es pas bien, ma p'tite. Tu peux bien me laisser de te dire ces choses, moi ton vieux maître. La prochaine fois ça va mieux.'

The second engagement was hockey, for the whole school. They walked to the field two and two. Ann hurriedly asked as many girls as possible to walk with her, one after the other. 'Oh, you can't? I'm sorry,' she would say, and go on to the next one. She had worked through a considerable proportion of the school when Margaret Parbury told her she was to walk with Ida Barrett.

Ida Barrett was a shy, nervous girl of about fifteen, and Ann began an animated conversation with her the

moment they set out. As she knew she would get no replies, she sustained both parts of the duologue herself, imitating Ida Barrett's voice and manner when it was her turn to speak.

'Beautiful weather for the time of year, is it not, Miss Barrett? We ought to have an agreeable game of hockey, I think.'

Then in a hurried, shrinking tone: 'You know I mustn't speak to you, Ann. I wish you'd be quiet.'

The imitation was so good that one or two girls looked back to see if it was really Ida Barrett who was talking, which gave Ann the opportunity of rebuking them. 'You are very naughty girls,' she said severely, 'to take any notice of me. I shall report you to Miss Parbury, who will send you to Coventry.'

Then, with a resumption of her previous polite air of conversation: 'May I ask, Miss Barrett, if you have ever familiarised yourself with the town of Coventry? Ah, no? You should. I know of a young girl—I assure you a charming young girl—whom you would like very much. She is making a short *séjour* there. Her name is Marie Germaine Félicité Ann-spelt-in-the-English-fashion Sinclair.'

Imitation of Ida Barrett, getting still more nervous and flustered: 'I wish you'd be quiet, Ann. The monitors told me not to speak to you, and they will be very angry with me if I do.'

'I wish to tell you about this charming young girl. She is descended from William the Conqueror, *through* William Rufus, you understand, and I *think*, from Pekahiah, but I am not quite certain about that.' Change of tone: 'Nora O'Brien, three rows in advance, I can see you laughing. I shall *certainly* report you to Miss Parbury—or to Miss Finney, whose shoe has come unlaced.' Resumption of polite tone: 'Excuse me, Miss Barrett! I have to keep these troublesome girls

in order, especially Miss Finney, who is untidy in her dress, and has no sense of shame.'

Representation of Ida Barrett, in a state of almost tearful remonstrance. 'I *do* wish you'd be quiet, Ann. You will get me into *such* trouble with the monitors, and I *do* love them all so.'

'Qu'est ce que c'est que ces moniteurs, Miss Barrett? The charming young girl of whom I spoke to you had some friends called *moniteurs*, but she found them rather *collet monté*—how do you say it? stuck up. There was one called Mam'selle Parburri, who counselled her to inhabit Coventry, and another called Mam'selle Finni, who was untidy in her dress, and had no sense of shame.'

Word was sent down the line that everybody was to talk, and not listen to Ann Sinclair's impertinences. As a counterstroke it was not brilliantly conceived, but seemed to be the only one available for the moment. Ann passed it on herself, in an official voice, and in the amended form: 'Everybody is to talk to Ann Sinclair, and not listen to Margaret Parbury's impertinences'; but as Ida Barrett also passed it on, correctly, Ann was relieved of the necessity of keeping it up any longer, and her unfortunate companion was left in peace.

Ann was in First Game, and had risen to a position in which she was usually chosen in a pick-up about half way down. She played half-back on the left wing, was very neat and quick on her thin legs, and quite fearless of having them damaged. This afternoon she was the last to be picked, but was given her usual place in the field, and prepared herself to take an active part in the game.

She was here, there, and everywhere, but, through an apparent excess of zeal, not often where she was wanted. When the first penalty corner stroke was played she was over the line just before the ball was hit, and the

line had to be formed up again and the stroke repeated, for which she apologised; but the same thing happened at the second hit, and once or twice later on. She was so anxious that goals should be scored for her side that she constantly tried to make them herself, from some distance off, instead of passing to her forwards, but never once succeeded in getting the ball between the posts. At the end of the game the other side had won by five goals to one, and Ann told Ida Barrett on the way back that she had enjoyed it enormously and looked forward to the next one.

XI

So far, Ann had had very much the best of it. But feeling was beginning to rise against her. For one thing, she had spoilt the game of twenty-one other girls; for another, she had reduced the monitors to a feeling of impotence which they were burning to redress.

On the rare occasions within memory on which girls had been sent to Coventry, they had gone about looking miserable, and penitently accepted their release the moment it had been offered to them. It was the last awful, dreaded punishment. But Ann had taken it as a release from all bonds of respectful behaviour. During the walk to the hockey field, she had been abominably cheeky to the monitors before the whole school, and might be more cheeky still, and what could they do? They had shot their bolt. It would be acknowledging defeat at her hands to complain to Miss Sutor, and besides, the understanding with the headmistress was that if they took it upon themselves to send a girl to Coventry, they must carry the punishment through themselves. It was what it had been allowed them for—the last prop and stay of their authority. If, as had

never yet happened, the culprit was recalcitrant up to the full time allowed, they could appeal to Miss Sutor; but at the rate at which she was going Ann would have upset all authority long before the week was up; and that must be stopped somehow.

After all, it was one girl of thirteen, the last comer to the school—this was an added offence—against all the rest, and she had done a thing that, however she might brazen it out, they were justified in punishing her for. She could be brought to a sense of her condition, but it would have to be by taking the offensive against her, and ways had to be concerted for doing that.

There was a cubicle set aside for Ann and Hilda Lang to change in, in the dormitory of which Mabel Finney was the monitor. Some light skirmishing had gone on during the few minutes taken to change into hockey dress, in which Ann had held her own. The others had talked among themselves, and taken no notice of the occasional remarks she had called out. But in the longer process of dressing after hockey, there was a change of policy. Ann was discussed, as if she were not there, except that, of course, everything that was said about her was intended for her ears. She threw in her occasional remarks, which were variations on: 'I'm here, you know; I can hear everything you say,' and sometimes scored by a sharp interpolation. But she could not make headway against five girls determined to ignore her, and had to listen to a good deal that reflected itself on her face in a very different way from that indicated by the voice in which she answered them.

The personal remarks caused her no particular distress. They were what might be called 'flappery,' with a good many 'of courses' and 'my dears' thrown in, and were obviously made up for the occasion. But

even in them she caught echoes of jealousies that she had not known to exist, which hurt her, although she scarcely understood them.

Her hair was like a fuzz-bush. She would grow up like a maypole. She was the most overdressed girl in the school, and alternatively she was dressed like a baby, and the wonder was she didn't come to school in a perambulator. She thought a great deal of herself because her people were rich, and had titles. This was from Helen Webster, who had been to tea with her, and she blushed hotly at it, more for the speaker's sake than her own.

Mabel Finney took no part in these opening remarks, and after the last speech, turned the conversation on to Ann's impertinence to Margaret Parbury, who was a full nineteen, and universally liked and respected.

'I should expect her to make fun of *me*,' said Mabel Finney. 'I'm not pretty, and I have to wear spectacles, and my people can't afford to give me the sort of clothes *she* wears.' ('How funny you'd look in them!' from Ann.) 'Those are just the things that a girl like that *would* make fun of. But when it comes to a girl like Margaret, it's different. Everybody knows how nice she is, and if you'd only seen the way in which she treated *her* this morning, not taking any notice of her rudeness—and trying to make her ashamed of what she had done!'

'She was awfully sweet to poor Mary about it too,' said another voice. 'She did her best to get out the marks, and when they saw it was no good, and Mary said she didn't feel as if she could go on with it any more, after it's being spoilt the second time, she almost cried herself, she was so sorry for her.'

'Everybody was sorry for her.'

'Except the one who did it.'

'All *she* could do was to call her names, even after

she said she would forgive her if she would only say she was sorry.'

'What did she call her?'

'It was when she came into the class-room, very proud of herself for being rude upstairs, and thinking we should all be on her side. She said Mary Polegate had sat there looking like a china dog.'

'Did she really say that?'

'Yes; in French. She uses the most horrible expressions in French—goodness knows where she picked them up—and thinks nobody will understand them. I asked Mademoiselle, and she said no lady would think of using such an expression in France. It's worse than it sounds in English.'

'It would be bad enough in English, after what she had done. To call her *any* name would.'

How Ann wished she had known that foolish Hilda Lang had made her addition in a way that could not be rubbed out! She had taken a dreadful deed on her shoulders, and treated it in a dreadful way. But she must go on with it now.

Mabel Finney took it up. 'It just shows what she really is,' she said, 'underneath all her pretence. But I was going to tell you—the other monitors said I could—that in the first meeting we had, Margaret said that she couldn't believe she had really done it.' Ann listened hard here. 'I won't say who we thought it might have been, because that wouldn't be fair.'

'Oh, don't be silly. Of course you mean Hilda Lang.'

'Well, I ought not to have said it in a way to make you think that. Nobody mentioned her name, and I *hope* it won't be said, when she comes back, that anybody suspected her.'

'I shall tell her that *you* did,' called out Ann.

'I mean by anybody whose word you could believe,' continued Mabel Finney. 'What Margaret said was

that *she* might have worked upon somebody so that she would think it was clever to do what she wouldn't do herself.'

'That would be awfully mean.'

'And just like her.'

'Yes. But Margaret didn't mean it in that way. She said she didn't think we ought even to say that *she* had done it, until she had an opportunity of defending herself. She said that she was naughty and troublesome sometimes, but she had never thought she would do anything really unkind.'

'She knows better now.'

'Yes, of course. But I tell you that just to show you how she stood up for her. And that's the girl—years older than herself—that she can only be vulgarly rude to.'

'It's a good thing they found the pencil in her desk. If they hadn't, Hilda Lang might have been suspected, and as she's away ill she couldn't defend herself.'

'That would just have suited *her*. She's quite mean enough to have let her bear the blame.'

'No, she isn't,' Ann called out. She had to say something, but hoped the quiver in her voice had not been noticed. She saw it all now. She had bought herself a pencil with red at one end and blue at the other. Hilda Lang had taken it for her fell purpose. There was no offence in that, as they had agreed to share all such things; but she wished she had told her.

Ann's dressing did not take so long as that of the boarders. When she could command her voice, she called out: 'I can't stay any longer, girls. I'm going down to bag one of the arm-chairs.'

There was a short interval before tea-time, which the girls who had finished dressing spent in the big hall. This was their general sitting-room. There were some arm-chairs in it, which it was understood that the monitors occupied, if they were there.

Ann was the first down, but she did not appropriate an arm-chair. She thought it would be easier to sit at a table and immerse herself in a book. There was another ordeal immediately before her.

XII

TEA was an informal meal, at which no mistresses were present. Cakes and other extras were allowed, provided by the girls themselves. They were very plentiful at the beginning of term, but apt to run short towards the close. Ann had been a godsend in coaxing all sorts of things out of the cook at home, in the latter lean days, and had promised for this evening a great cake, fresh from the oven, which Lizzie was under orders to bring up just before tea-time. She had not countermanded it in the morning, not having been altogether without hope, and with a vague idea of propitiation in her mind, and had forgotten it in the afternoon. But the devoted cook had not. Ann stole into the dining-room on her way to the hall, and there was the huge cake, hot and spicy, at the bottom of the table, where it was the custom for the dispenser of hospitality to sit, with the head girl at the other end opposite to her.

The girls gradually filled the chairs down the long table. In the ordinary way, those on either side of Ann would have been taken at least as readily as the others; but now they were left for the last comers.

Ann got her cup of tea from the side-table, and took it to her place. Then she stood up with the cake knife in her hand, and carefully counted the heads round the table. Everybody affected to take no notice of her, but the buzz of talk did not sound quite natural.

Ann began to cut the cake. She looked at each girl, beginning with Margaret Parbury, as she cut her

appointed slice, and went over the count once or twice as she worked down the table.

She came to Gertrude Knight, who had been one of her late tormentors in the dormitory. Gertrude Knight was a fat girl of sixteen, who was known to have once kept a large box of chocolates in her desk and eaten them all herself, and had suffered from a reputation for greediness ever since. Ann considered her with her head on one side, and then cut a slice rather more than twice the size of the rest.

There were subdued titters. Gertrude Knight threw a glance down the table, and there were more titters. But Ann was seriously considering the next person.

When she had cut up half the cake, she said: 'That's enough to begin with.' (Hilda Strangways was on the other side of the table, and she did not want to include her in the comedy.) She started off to the top of the table carrying the cake, which was almost too heavy for her.

'No, thank you,' said Margaret Parbury. 'No, thank you,' said Rosamund Felstead, who was sitting next to her. Ann went conscientiously down the line until she came to Gertrude Knight, who said: 'No, thank you,' like all the rest. Ann rested the heavy plate on the table by her side, where the savoury reek could greet her nostrils. 'Oh, do have a little morsel,' she said. 'It is very light. It won't do you any harm.'

Gertrude Knight said, 'No, thank you,' again, but was unable to forbear a fleeting side-glance at the delicacy. Whereupon the titters broke out again here and there.

'Go and sit down,' said Margaret Parbury, in a clear voice. 'Nobody wants any cake.'

Ann obeyed her. It was the first time she had acknowledged the voice of authority. When she reached her own seat, she offered herself a piece of cake, and

refused it in a haughty voice, but pressed it upon herself solicitously, and finally took it. Afterwards she wished she hadn't, for although she tried very hard to finish it, she had to leave some of it on her plate, which she did with the remark that it wasn't quite as good as usual, and she should bring another one the next day.

XIII

ANN turned up at school the next morning looking very neat and fresh, and not at all as if she had cried herself to sleep the night before. She had prepared one or two small surprises of attack, under the more hopeful light of morning, but the enemy was also in the mood for attack now, and got in their strokes first.

She was summoned to Margaret Parbury who asked her shortly if she had come to her senses yet, and when she replied that she had always had them, wasted no time on her, but said : ' Here's the money you subscribed for Miss Sutor's present. We are not going to let a girl who behaves as you do have anything to do with the things that we arrange among ourselves. And of course we are not going to accept the things that you offered for the supper.'

Ann flushed deeply. ' Miss Sutor will think I didn't want to subscribe, if my name isn't on the list with the others,' she said.

' We can't help that,' said Margaret. ' If you do what we have told you to before Friday, when we shall write the list, your name will be in it. It's entirely for you to have it there or not.'

' It's very unfair,' cried Ann. ' You can't make me do what you want by sending me to Coventry, so you try to *embrouille* me with Miss Sutor, by spite.'

Margaret Parbury and Nora O'Brien had not wished

to take this step, but the other four monitors, including good Mary Polegate, had voted for it, and Margaret had to carry out the decision. She was just, but she was a little hard. And her authority, which she had always exercised with care and moderation, had been impudently flouted by Ann.

'It is evident that Coventry is not much punishment to you,' she said. 'For one thing, you live at home, and when you go away from here you are able to forget it altogether. But we are not doing this for an extra punishment. We are simply not going to recognise you as being one of us at all, more than we are obliged.'

'Am I to play at the concert?' asked Ann.

She had touched a weak spot. Margaret met it with the full truth. 'We would much rather you didn't,' she said. 'But M. Lanson would make a great fuss, and he might upset everything.'

'Perhaps I shan't play,' said Ann. 'If you don't want a fuss made you had better let me subscribe to Miss Sutor's present. It's very unfair not to. I didn't like Miss Sutor very much at first, but I do like her now, and she will think I don't.'

'If you don't play, you will have to make your own excuses, and we shall be glad to have it settled like that. We are not going to let you subscribe to Miss Sutor's present.'

'You're a set of *beasts*,' Ann broke out passionately, and was proceeding to the expression of further injuries; but Margaret took her by the shoulders and put her out of the room.

She went downstairs in a flaming temper, and flung into the class-room, where the girls were waiting for her. As she sat herself down at her desk, she saw a piece of paper in front of her. On it was written: 'The girls asked to tea with Ann Sinclair on Saturday are not coming.'

Ann tore the paper in half and threw it on the floor. 'Sales bêtes !' she said.

The battle was fully joined now. It was one against many, but Ann's attacks were widely distributed, and could only be met by counter-attacks, and in combination. For that morning at least she was unable to get back to her attitude of not caring, and although she made valiant efforts to resume it afterwards, her sallies no longer met with their previous success, and she was often dislodged from her entrenchments and driven into angry recriminations. This gave the enemy invariable advantage, which they were not slow to make use of.

It must not be supposed that the whole school took active part in the fray. More than half the girls simply stood aside, and there were others whose mild pricks were ineffective. There were even some who felt uncomfortable, quite apart from the general discomfort of the situation, at the way Ann was being treated. But if this feeling found expression, it was always added that she had only herself to thank for it. She was behaving outrageously. If she would keep quiet, she would be let alone. And, of course, no compromise could be made with her as long as she remained unrepentant of her first offence, which, however, was gradually being lost sight of in the turmoil and irritation of the conflict.

Girls are not so cruel as boys, but they have their share of spite, and Ann roused it wherever it existed. It was unfortunate for her that it should have found fertile ground in Mabel Finney's dormitory. If the girls inclined to be sorry for Ann had known how she was treated there, objection would certainly have been taken. Mabel Finney's lack of physical attraction extended to her character. As monitor, she set some bounds to her own wounding speeches, but exercised small control over the tongues of the rest. Gertrude

Knight had received an injury from Ann which she repaid with as much rancour as her slow mind was capable of. Helen Webster's essential vulgarity of disposition and her jealousy of Ann found utterance through her sharp tongue. The other two girls were sometimes ashamed of the things that were said, but followed the lead of the rest. Ann would escape from the dormitory quivering in every sensitive nerve, but she never let them know how much they hurt her, and still threw an occasional sharp dart of speech at them across the tops of the cubicles.

She had, in fact, made a miscalculation at the outset. She had thought that if she never showed distress, and made herself as amusing as possible, she would have her own contemporaries at least laughing with her, though officially they would have to ignore her. She would thus be able to reject the disgrace of Coventry, and only have to sustain its inconveniences. But she had a little overdone the humour, and had not reckoned on any effective body of dislike. How could she have done, when she had always had the world at her feet, and had never known unkindness in her life?

She knew it now.

XIV

ON Wednesday afternoon, all the girls had changed for hockey as usual, but a sudden sharp downpour, which developed into steady rain, kept them indoors. Presently they changed back again, and Ann was too dispirited during the second process to make the usual retorts. If she had known it was going to rain she need not have come back to school at all until after tea, and might have been sitting at peace with a book, with dear Granny, or in her own pretty room at home.

Now she had a dreary afternoon in front of her in the hall, where everybody else would be amusing themselves happily, and she, at the best, would be left to her own company.

If only she had brought her violin with her! She might have got away by herself to practise. But it was not her afternoon for a lesson, and she thought it was of no use trying to borrow one.

But to her surprise, Margaret Parbury came up to her, where she was sitting shunned and alone, and said: 'If you would like to practise for the concert, Mildred Worsley will lend you her violin, and you can go up to your cubicle.'

Ann accepted, with a grateful glance which Margaret did not meet. Mildred Worsley's violin was not the companion that her own beloved Gagliano would have been, but she much preferred it to any other companionship that was available for the moment, and even the now-dreaded cubicle changed its aspect, as she practised her phrases over and over again by heart, and varied them by an occasional excursion into other fields of memory.

She had been playing for half an hour, when the door of the dormitory opened. She paled, and left off playing. Surely they could not be coming up to get ready for tea yet! The colour flooded her face again as the door of her cubicle opened and Hilda Strangways came in.

'Margaret said I might talk to you, Ann, if you'd let me,' she said.

It was an added pang that her own treatment of Hilda should have made it doubtful whether she would let her talk to her. 'I'm only too pleased,' she said, with a faint attempt at a smile.

'Well, put the violin down, then.'

Ann did as she was told. Hilda sat down on the

bed. 'Ann, dear, don't you think you've had enough now?' she said. 'Can't you say you're sorry?'

Ann looked down. 'I'm very sorry I behaved so badly to *you*,' she said. 'I was, directly I'd done it.'

Hilda put her arm round her and drew her towards her. Her slender body, which quivered a little, and the look in her face, made her seem very childish and pathetic to the older girl. 'Oh, well, perhaps I understand that better than you'd think,' she said. 'It used to take me like that sometimes when I was younger. Something inside you makes you do the opposite to what you want to do. I thought afterwards that if I hadn't shown I was offended with you, you'd have done what I wanted. Would you?'

'Oh, yes, I would. I felt horrible inside of me when I was teasing Mary Polegate, and you heard me.'

'Yes, I thought so. It was silly of you to behave like that, but you know you *are* rather a baby sometimes, Ann. It makes it difficult for older girls who want to be friends with you.'

'I don't suppose you want to be friends with me now,' said Ann, forlornly.

'Yes, I do. I've been feeling dreadfully sorry for you.'

The light frame relaxed against her, and an arm stole round her neck. Ann's own music had made her feel mournful, and she wanted to cry. But she knew she mustn't do that, until she got home; for if she once began, she would not be able to leave off, and it would be all over with her powers of resistance.

Hilda gave her a little hug, and put her cheek against hers. She knew that Ann must be wanting to cry, and thought she might have an easier task with her if she did. For she had only so far cleared the way for what Margaret, without consulting the other monitors, had told her she might break Ann's Coventry for.

There was a pause, while the comfort of the arm around her, and the cheek against hers, stole into Ann's hungry being. Then Hilda said: 'Ann, don't set everybody against you any more. It's dreadful to have to look on at it; and I can't get away from it, you know, like you can. It goes on after you have gone home.'

Ann felt to the full this generous way of putting it. Hilda was going to make it very hard for her to hold out.

'Are they very awful?' she asked, in a lighter tone. 'You have no idea how awful they are up here. But I say things they don't like to swallow, too.'

She felt Hilda's arm relax ever so little, and pressed all the closer to her. 'Do you think I am very wicked to answer them back?' she asked. 'But I don't wish that they shall march on my feet.'

Hilda drew her cheek away, and Ann stood up straighter, but still kept her arm rather tight round Hilda's neck. She was under the hard necessity of disappointing this friend, but she would cling to her as long as she could. 'I can support the consequences till the end of the week,' she said; 'especially if you are going to be friends with me when it is all over.'

'What I can't understand,' said Hilda, 'is your doing it at all. I saw you had left off teasing Mary, and I simply couldn't believe it, when I saw what you had done.'

So she *had* noticed—on that unhappy afternoon! Ann put her cheek to hers again, but said nothing.

Hilda did not draw away this time. 'Ann dear, why did you? Was it because I wouldn't take any notice of you, when I thought you were sorry? If so, it was partly my fault.'

'Oh, no,' sighed Ann. 'It's all a dreadful muddle. Please don't ask me about it any more.'

Hilda thought hard. 'It wasn't *like* you, Ann,' she said.

Ann felt that this was getting dangerous. Perhaps, if Hilda had come to her in this way before, she might have confided to her how matters stood, and bound her to secrecy. It would not have been so bad if there had been some one who understood her. But now she had gone so far, she could not bear to say, even to her: 'Hilda Lang did it.' The words would have stuck in her throat. She stood up again. 'I thought it would have rubbed out,' she said.

Hilda was still thinking. 'You had two whole days to think it over,' she said. 'You *must* have known you had done something very unkind, and I could see on Monday morning, and on Sunday in church too, that you weren't against *me* any more. Why did you come to school in the mood you did?'

'I said I would say I was sorry the illumination was spoilt. I only wouldn't sign the paper.'

'But you weren't sorry at all. You couldn't have been. Not really sorry—the way you behaved to the monitors. Margaret says you began to be cheeky to them before they said anything to you at all. You must have made that all up before you came, Ann.'

'Perhaps I did—some of it,' said Ann. 'I knew that everybody would be very angry with me, and I have not the habitude to support that. Besides, I did not know until afterwards that it had truly been spoilt, or I wouldn't have behaved exactly as I did. I thought it had been done with pencil that would rub out.'

Hilda looked at her. What did the last sentence mean? It might only have been Ann's slightly un-English way of saying that she had thought her own red and blue marks would rub out; or——

'Was it you who did it, Ann?'

Ann looked away, and her colour came and went.

She drew her arm from Hilda's neck. 'Oh, why do you *embête* me?' she said impatiently. 'I won't talk about it any more. You know everything, and it is very tiresome to me to say it over again.'

Hilda took no notice of her petulance. She would not have spoken to her like that if——

'Ann, look at me straight, and tell me whether you did it—yes or no.'

Ann's eyes came round to hers, unwillingly, and half-frightened. Hilda read the truth in them before Ann could speak.

She caught her to her. 'Oh, my poor little Ann!' she cried.

Ann wrenched herself free. 'You are not to say that I didn't do it,' she said vehemently. 'You are not to tell that to Margaret Parbury, or any of the others. I do not say that I didn't do it.'

'You are letting them think that you did it until——'

Ann put her hand over her mouth before she could finish. 'You are not to say anything,' she said. 'If you say that you think I didn't do it, they will know that it came from me, and I won't have them say that.'

Hilda disengaged her hand and held it, and Ann too. 'Ann, darling,' she said. 'If I tell Margaret, and——'

'No, no,' cried Ann. 'You are not to tell anybody. If you do, I will not speak to you again. You won't be my friend. You must give me your promise that you won't.'

She was so vehement, and the determination in her was so strong, that Hilda allowed herself to be overborne. She wanted to say that she would tell Margaret, under a promise of secrecy. But Ann would not let her say anything. She would not let her put her discovery into words, even for herself.

When she had given the promise, much against her will, Ann became quieter, all of a sudden. She hid her

face on Hilda's shoulder, and breathed a deep sigh. 'You will talk to me sometimes, won't you?' she said — 'when the others are not there? It is so miserable to be always alone, and to feel that they all hate me.'

Hilda was crying a little, if Ann wasn't. 'Oh, why couldn't that silly girl——' she began. But Ann had her hand over her mouth again.

Hilda kissed her, though she knew that Ann did not care about kissing among girls, and it was not what Ann would have called a habitude of Hilda's either. But Ann returned the kiss, and said that she could 'support the consequences' better now.

XV

PRESENTLY Hilda left Ann, and went back to Margaret. Margaret looked at her sharply, for the traces of emotion were still apparent on her face.

'She won't sign the paper,' she said.

Margaret looked disappointed. 'I did hope you'd have been able to persuade her,' she said. 'Was she cheeky to you?'

'Oh, no. Margaret, I'm awfully sorry for the poor little thing. She won't give in, but she's feeling it dreadfully.'

'Well, she deserves to feel it. It's all very well, Hilda, but it's either her giving in or our giving in. We were quite right to punish her for doing what she did, and we simply can't allow her to get the better of us.'

'But lots of the girls are so awfully unkind to her, especially——'

'My dear, that's entirely her fault. If she would keep quiet everybody would just leave her alone.'

'They are really cruel to her up in the dormitory,

and Mabel doesn't do anything to stop them. She wouldn't tell me the things they said; but some of them must have been pretty horrible. She dreads going up there.'

Margaret looked serious. 'I'll say something to Mabel,' she said. 'But I can't say much, because I'm not supposed to know. But I do know that it's bringing out all the worst there is in some girls—those who only want an excuse to be spiteful. I can see that for myself. Oh, I'm sick of the whole business. It's spoiling everything. But it's all that tiresome child's fault. She *is* badly in the wrong. You know that as well as I do, Hilda. Of course she is attractive, and has heaps of good points; but you ought not to let that weigh with you against what she did, and all the harm she's doing to the school now. I was half afraid you would, when I let you go and talk to her. You see you come back sympathising with her, and yet you haven't done anything to move her.'

'I did my best,' said Hilda, rather weakly. She was in a very difficult position. She blamed herself for having promised Ann that she would keep the truth absolutely to herself, but did not know that she had had very little to do with it, as Ann, in spite of her youth, could at any time have imposed her will upon her, if she were determined to do so.

But Margaret was disturbed by her own difficulties. 'She simply sits there and defies us all,' she said. 'If she holds out till the end of the week, as I suppose she will now, I shall have to go to Miss Sutor, and admit that none of us can do anything with her. Of course she'll be punished again for what she did, but that won't do us any good. I know what Miss Sutor will say. If we can't make our authority felt, even by sending a girl to Coventry for a week, there must be something wrong in the way we exercise it.'

'There wouldn't be with you,' said Hilda, 'but there would be with Mabel Finney, and some of the others, if they just take a pleasure in tormenting her.'

'They ought not to do that. But *I* haven't done it, and I can't do anything with her. She's fond of you, but you can't either. She seems just to have got over you. Bother the little imp! I've a good mind to go straight to Miss Sutor and tell her now.'

'Oh, you mustn't do that, Margaret. Miss Sutor told her that if she were reported to her again, she would tell Lady Sinclair, and ask her to take her away. She told me that before.'

'I wish she would take her away. No, I don't mean that. She's all right when she *is* all right.'

'Margaret, I believe she was afraid that Miss Sutor would be told, and that's why she was so cheeky to all of you.' Ann had told her as much as that.

'What do you mean?'

'She wanted you to send her to Coventry instead.'

'But we shouldn't have done anything, if she'd behaved properly. Fancy doing a thing like that and *not* being sorry for it! Her naughtiness isn't *all* high spirits and cleverness, you know, Hilda. I call that *really* bad in a child. And the way she behaved to Mary! Didn't you point all that out to her?'

'Oh, yes,' said Hilda, hastily. 'But it was the paper she had to sign.'

Margaret looked vexed. 'That was Susan,' she said. 'Her father is a K.C., and she must have everything legal. I was against it, and so was Nora. Supposing we were to give up the paper! But no, we can't do that. It would be acknowledging that she had beaten us. There was nothing unkind in it. It would have been easier for her than to tell everybody she was sorry. Besides, she wasn't sorry, whatever she may be now. Why doesn't she go to Mary and apologise?'

It would make some difference. Didn't you ask her that? I told you to.'

Hilda had forgotten this commission, but Mary Polegate's name had been mentioned between her and Ann. 'She says she doesn't think Mary is as good as she looks,' she said.

Margaret frowned, and then laughed vexedly. 'I wish her chart had been at the bottom of the sea,' she said. 'But she *was* nice enough about it, when she had once got over her disappointment.'

'She was just not nice enough. And she's quite satisfied that Ann's life should be made a burden to her now. Last night, when Gertrude Knight and Helen Webster were laughing about some of the spiteful things they had been saying about Ann upstairs, Mary sat and listened, looking like a holy Cheshire cat, and didn't say a word. I suppose she's only stupid, but stupid people can be just as unkind as clever ones.'

Margaret passed this by. She had her own opinion of good Mary Polegate, but there was loyalty to be observed.

'You know, Miss Sutor will have to be told at the end of the week,' she said. 'I think she's getting restive about it now. Of course she knows everything that's going on. She always does.'

'Do you think she knows about the chart being spoilt?'

'Oh, yes. Miss Hastings will have told her, and about the Coventry too. She'll let it go on till the end of the week, but I shall have to tell her on Sunday. I shan't on Saturday, because of her birthday.'

'The week won't be over till Monday morning, when the Coventry began.'

Hilda Lang would be back on Monday morning. Her father, who had been to the school, had said so.

'As Ann is a day-pupil, it will be over for her on

Saturday evening, when she goes home, after the concert.

'Miss Sutor is going to tea with Lady Sinclair on Sunday. Ann told me so. Don't tell her till Monday, Margaret.'

'Very well. It doesn't make much difference.

Hilda knew that it would make a good deal. The bell rang for tea, and they went in together.

XVI

ANN was summoned to Margaret Parbury again the next morning. Upheld by the knowledge of Hilda's sympathy, she had come bright and fresh to the day's campaign. Her wounds were deep, but she could hide them better now. It was Hilda who had met her in the cloak-room and told her to go to Margaret. She was feeling almost happy for the moment.

Margaret looked at her in baffled surprise, as she came in smiling. Wasn't it possible to touch this child's conscience? She had a suspicion that Hilda had allowed her to 'get over' her again.

'Did Hilda tell you what I wanted you for?' she asked.

'No,' said Ann.

'We have decided to take your subscription for Miss Sutor's present. Our objections to it are just the same as they were, but it would look afterwards as if we had tried to punish you by not letting you join, and we don't want that.'

Margaret was always very direct. She had worked hard for this, and that was the reason she had given to the other monitors; so she gave it to Ann.

'Oh, thank you,' said Ann gratefully. 'I'm very glad of that. It was a trouble to me that she wouldn't

see my name in the list.' It crossed her quick mind to ask whether Mary Polegate was going to illuminate the list, but she rejected the temptation and asked instead: 'Is it permitted to me to see the present?'

Was this veiled impertinence? One never knew, with Ann's somewhat peculiar English. The present had been bought two days before, and had naturally not been shown to Ann. But as she was to share in it, she had, of course, a right to see it.

Margaret showed her the present—a chased silver rose bowl. Ann looked at it with her head on one side. 'It is *épatant*,' she said, 'and exactly what I should have chosen myself. Thank you, Margaret.'

Margaret still had her suspicions; but Ann had spoken nicely. She would soon know if she meant to be cheeky. 'I want to speak to you once more,' she said. 'You have had three days of Coventry now. I should think you must be getting rather tired of it, aren't you?'

'Yes, I am very tired of it,' said Ann, with a sigh. 'I shall be very glad when the week is past.'

'Why should it go on for a week? You won't get out of it, you know, when the week is past. Miss Sutor will have to be told, and I'm quite sure she won't overlook it altogether, even though you *have* been to Coventry. If you say you are sorry now, it will be all over. Surely, you must be a little sorry, aren't you?'

'Yes, I am very sorry. But I can't sign the paper, Margaret. Please don't ask me to. As you are gentle to me, and have shown me the present, I don't want to displease you. But I have made a promise to myself not to sign the paper.'

Margaret had also worked hard to get the tiresome paper out of the way, as she wanted it all ended now, even at the cost of giving way to Ann a little. But she had not been successful. Susan Norris had wavered,

but good Mary Polegate had said that, although she bore no malice towards Ann for what she had done, she thought she ought to be made to sign the paper as an example.

Margaret saw that Ann would be inflexible on this point, and wasted no further time on it. But she thought that if she could be persuaded to apologise to Mary Polegate there might be found a way out. 'If you are sorry, as you say you are now,' she said, 'will you go and tell Mary so?'

Ann considered. 'I don't *want* to do that,' she said. 'It would be a little *hypocritic* now. I am not so sorry for *her* as I was at first. I think she finds my being in Coventry, for what was done to her chart, more amusing than if it had not been done at all.'

This searching piece of psychology so illuminated Margaret's own impatient feeling towards good Mary Polegate, that she was unable to press the suggestion. Still, it was Ann who was to be thanked for having brought out this and some other unhandsome traits of character which had hitherto slumbered. 'You won't do that, and you won't do anything,' she said impatiently. 'It's no good trying to help you.'

'I didn't say I wouldn't do it,' said Ann. 'I will, if you tell me to. I was only trying to explicate to you what I felt about it.'

It was a new turn in Ann's baffling character to be willing to do as she was told. 'It's a pity you didn't behave like this at first,' said Margaret. 'If you had, you needn't have been sent to Coventry at all, and perhaps you needn't have signed the paper, as you seem to object to it so much. You *were*—very rude, and of course it has been difficult to forget it.'

'I was sorry for that too, afterwards,' said Ann. 'Mabel Finney told the other girls up in the dormitory, and she spoke so loud that I couldn't help hearing her,

that you were very gentle about me, when you found it all out. If I had known that, I shouldn't have been rude to you. At least, not *so* rude,' she added, remembering that a certain amount of rudeness had been necessary for her purpose, and having a strict regard for truth.

'There's no reason why you should suppose I shouldn't be gentle, as you call it,' said Margaret, rather touched, in spite of herself. 'You didn't give me a chance—or anybody else.'

She was at her wits' end. She knew that Ann would not sign the paper, and it was of no use to send her to Mary Polegate with a half apology. In the present state of feeling against her, it would be insisted on that she should go through with her Coventry, and that Miss Sutor should be told afterwards. There were those who were already looking forward to Miss Sutor's being told.

'I shan't be rude to *you* any more,' said Ann. 'I respect you too much now, Margaret.'

Margaret's mouth relaxed. 'Well, I'm glad of that, at any rate,' she said. 'Will you apologise to the other monitors, as you have to me? That might do something.'

Ann considered again. 'Do you mean all of them together?' she asked.

This would be no good. Margaret couldn't get them together to be sweetly apologised to for the smaller offence, while the greater would in no way be purged. 'No, I mean to all of them separately,' she said, 'as you have done to me. I am quite willing to accept your apology.'

'Thank you, Margaret. I would apologise to Nora O'Brien, but I was only a little rude to her, and she laughed. And I would to Rosamund Felstead, though she was rather rude to *me*, and *wanted* to send me to Coventry. I told Susan Norris that she wouldn't be

likely to use French words justly; but perhaps she would, if she searched for them in a dictionary.'

'I don't want you to *pretend* to apologise, and make it an excuse for being impertinent again. We have had quite enough of that sort of thing.'

'Well, yes, I would apologise to Susan, properly. I would to Mary Polegate too, as she has been injured, and I said she was like a *chien de faïence*, which I *certainly* ought not to have done.'

'You didn't say that to her.'

'No. I am not quite as bad as that.'

'Then there'd be no need to repeat it.'

'Very well. I should be glad not to, for I am, to say true, rather ashamed of it. I would apologise to Mary Polegate for being rude, also for her chart being spoilt. I will *not* apologise to Mabel Finney for *anything*, whatever it may be; and when I come away from Coventry, if I am allowed to rest at this school, I will never speak to her again if I can help it.'

She said this firmly, with her eyes on Margaret's, and Margaret's dropped before them. It was extraordinary how this troublesome child, who had done an inexcusable thing, and was under just punishment for it, could abash one.

But was the punishment she was under in all respects just? 'If you have any complaint' to make against any girl,' Margaret said, 'you can bring it to me, or of course to the mistresses, if you like; and if it is of a monitor, I can bring it before the other monitors.'

'No,' said Ann. 'I would rather defend myself.'

'But you defend yourself by attacking others; and that makes it worse.'

'I am not going to do that any more. I have promised myself not to, after what Hilda said to me yesterday. Perhaps I shall make a pleasantry sometimes, if I think of something amusing, but not with

Mabel Finney, and others who resemble her. I have my feelings, Margaret, and they have hurt them very much. Whatever it may be that they say now, I shall make no response.'

Margaret had spoken to Mabel Finney the evening before about the girls who were going too far in their tormenting of Ann, and had found her irresponsible, and also inclined to be offended at being implicitly charged with the same offence. As head girl, Margaret had no more authority than the other monitors, and none at all over the monitors themselves. She was only their mouthpiece.

'Would you like to change in my room instead of in the cubicle?' she asked. She was quite prepared to show her disapproval of Mabel Finney's departure from the monitor's code by taking Ann under her special protection, now that Ann herself had given her the information. 'For the present,' she added. She did not want her cherished privacy permanently invaded.

'Thank you very much indeed, Margaret,' said Ann gratefully. 'Of course I should like it. But I had better rest in the cubicle. I won't let them say that they have chased me out. It is only for two days longer, and I can support the consequences until then.'

The bell rang. 'Well, you must go now,' said Margaret. 'What a lot of trouble you are giving us, Ann! Why did you play that silly trick?'

Ann passed this by. 'Am I to apologise to the other monitors?' she asked.

'No,' said Margaret shortly. 'Go along quickly, or you'll be late.'

XVII

As Margaret went down to her own class, it occurred to her with vexed amusement that Ann had done to her

exactly what she had complained that Hilda had let her do. She had 'got over' her.

In the course of the highly reasonable conversation that had passed between them, which Ann had supported with a dignity at least as great as her own, Ann had actually announced her intention of continuing to ignore the sentence of Coventry, if it suited her, and she had not even thought at the moment of rebuking her. At the end, Margaret had been more anxious to save Ann from the consequences of her punishment than to bring that punishment home; and she had asked her why she had 'played that silly trick,' as if her fault had been no more than a piece of childish mischief.

It seemed, indeed, little more than that to her now. They had all been hypnotised, for two whole terms, by Mary Polegate, with her illuminated chart of the Kings of Juda and Israel—a silly piece of work enough, and not even semi-sacred, as she had given it the air of being. Of course, it was a shame to spoil it, and it had been right to sympathise with Mary's distress. But it seemed plain now that Ann had not meant to spoil it, and although she had gone much too far in tampering with it at all, she had pricked a bubble that had turned out to be even more deceptive than bubbles usually are.

As for her impertinence, there seemed to have been a reason for that, if it was true what Hilda had said—that she was afraid of their telling Miss Sutor. It threw rather a different light on the picture, if one thought of the six big girls in authority pluckily faced by the single small one, who was all the time frightened of what might be done to her. There was no doubt about Ann's pluck, and as for her impertinence, it had not been used to hurt feelings, but only dignity.

Margaret suspected, as she thought it all over during a dull lesson, that there was after all something wrong

in the quality of the dignity that was being fought for now. She had always hated the sentimentality that led to big girls spoiling little ones, and had aimed at creating a tradition which would make the big girls keep more to themselves. But it had not turned out quite as she had wished. It would have been far better to have done what Hilda Strangways would probably do when she came to take her place, and encourage a less artificial intercourse between girls of all ages, while setting her face just as strongly against sentimentality. But she had not had the art to do that. She much preferred the society of girls of about her own age, and was without Hilda's sympathetic understanding of younger ones. The lack of it had led her to miscalculate this situation entirely. Hilda had found out at once that there were considerations behind Ann's naughtiness that ought to have been taken into account before passing sentence on her, while she herself had seen nothing that was not apparent on the surface.

And how were the monitors supporting the dignity which it was Ann's chief fault to have assailed?

She was their mouthpiece, but had been led to express more than one decision that she had not agreed with. Mabel Finney, who had never been a friend of hers, was behaving in a way that would get her turned out of her monitorship if Miss Sutor knew of it. The sentence of Coventry was not meant to be used as an instrument of torment, as she was allowing the girls in her dormitory to use it, and apparently using it herself. Mary Polegate had always been considered to have a good influence in the school, but she was now showing herself only smug and complacent; and if it was true that she had sat by and listened to what Hilda had said she had, without protesting, then Ann's criticism of her—that she was not as good as she looked—would

seem to be justified. Nora O'Brien was too careless and light-hearted to carry much weight, except by her frank and genial nature. She had been willing to follow Margaret's lead throughout this affair, but the only expression of opinion she had advanced of her own had been that 'a child as amusing as that ought not to be squashed,' which had not helped matters. If Ann had apologised separately to her, she would probably have egged her on to say something funny, and then laughed. Susan Norris was prim and well-meaning, but she had allowed herself to be affected by Ann's gibe at her French, which, however, she had brought on herself.

Rosamund Felstead was Margaret's particular friend. They were neighbours at home, and had many tastes in common; but their characters were very different. Rosamund was as sentimental as Margaret was the reverse. Margaret knew very well, and hated to know it, that the reason why they were just now more than usually polite to one another, and Rosamund had not backed her up in this affair, was that upon Ann's first arrival at the school she had taken a violent fancy to her, to which Ann had refused to respond. She had wanted to see her punished, but if Ann had gone to her with an-apology, she would have enjoyed the luxury of a possibly tearful scene with her, and tried to coddle her into penitence.

Margaret thought that even if Ann had done wrong, she was not showing up badly beside those who were imposing their displeasure on her. Her independence, though she was apt to carry it rather far, was exactly the quality that made headway against the sentimentality that Margaret hated. There had never been a girl come to the school who had had such a dead set made at her as Ann. Because of the different position she was in from the rest, bringing the rich glamour of

her home to bear upon the school life, because of her charming person and gay audacity, because of her funny ways of speech, and her appearance of being much younger than she was, she might have been the spoilt darling of the whole school. But she had shaken all the unwholesome adulation from off her thin shoulders and had quickly taken her place as leader among girls of her own standing. And she had been the right sort of leader, except in her tendency to encourage mild insubordination. The girls of her class were a much brighter, healthier lot than when they had been led by Helen Webster.

Well, the Coventry would have to go through, but Margaret would do all she could to see that it was kept in spirit as well as in letter, and when she told Miss Sutor about it she would tell her everything. She was rather surprised at the feeling of dismay which came to her when she thought of the possibility of Ann being taken away from the school. She had not thought that she had it in her to care whether any girl much younger than herself was there or not. Oh, decidedly, Ann had got over her. Bother the little imp!

XVIII

It was no part of Ann's new code of behaviour to show herself meek and subdued before the whole school. The 'pleasantries' which she had warned Margaret might demand expression came more readily to her mind now that her burden was lighter, and she led them a dance, just as she led Lizzie a dance at home, but without allowing herself to be hustled in return into losing her temper, as had happened during the second and third days of her Coventry.

As it was now pretty evident that she would not give

in before the week was up, she might be said to have won the first round of the contest already, and the majority were looking forward with anticipations that were either eager or fearful, according to their natures, to the second round, in which Miss Sutor would enter the arena. If Ann had not been goaded during those two days into sundry attacks that had embittered feeling against her, she would have had more than half the school on her side already; and when she reverted to providing amusement for them instead of offence the feeling began to subside once more.

But forces had been set in motion that were not easily brought to rest. In her own class, Helen Webster had stepped into her former position *vice* Ann deposed, and it would take some time to undo the effect of those two stormy days, in which Ann had run amok among all her former friends, and reduced many of them to the necessity of declaring indignantly that whether she were in Coventry or not, they would never speak to her again.

She took the bull by the horns during the change from first lesson to second, taken by a different mistress. 'Well, girls,' she said brightly, 'I have thought it over, and I have decided to pardon you. You were in bad humour yesterday, but perhaps it was also a little my fault, as I am too prompt to call people *sales bêtes*, and there are not many among you who truly deserve that title.'

Mademoiselle came in at this moment to take a lesson in Geography. But she could always be diverted into bypaths, if handled expertly, and Ann had frequently succeeded in having the greater part of the half-hour devoted to polite conversation which had nothing whatever to do with the configuration of the earth.

Ann was not by way of harassing mistresses just now, having enough on her hands already. But when

Mademoiselle had taken her seat, with a brisk air of expecting a concentrated attention on the matter in hand, which was justified by no previous experience, Helen Webster said: 'Mademoiselle, I wanted to ask you before you begin, whether it is the custom in France for nice people—ladies and gentlemen, I mean—to call each other dirty beasts.'

Mademoiselle was horrified at such an idea, and broke into voluble disclaimers of any impoliteness whatever among nice people in France.

'Then a girl who was continually saying "*sales bêtes*" to other girls couldn't belong to really nice people, I suppose.'

Mademoiselle was understood to say that such language might possibly be picked up from urchins in the gutter, but that otherwise no girl of good parentage would have ever so much as heard such an expression, which was very shocking, and if she used it in the hearing of her parents would be severely punished. She trusted that no girl in *this* school would ever permit it to be heard from her.

Here she looked at Ann, who might have been expected to have taken a bright part in the conversation long before this. But Ann was reading her geography book, in which she appeared to be deeply interested.

'Thank you,' said Helen Webster. 'I thought it must be like that; but we have heard such a lot of extraordinary French expressions lately that it is difficult to know what you may say and what you mayn't.'

It was not quite cricket to seek to embroil Ann with a mistress, and although Mademoiselle was hardly like other mistresses, Marie Baxter, who knew French better than the rest, said: 'Saying *sale bête* isn't *quite* the same as saying "dirty beast," is it. Mademoiselle?'

Mademoiselle saw very little difference, which might have been accounted for by her having been only six months in England. '*Sale bête*' was a horrible expression, and quite unallowable to well-nurtured girls. 'Ann Sinclair, *you*, who have been well brought up, would never use such words, I am sure,' she said.

Ann looked up. 'Plaît-il, Mademoiselle? I was reading in my geography.'

'Didn't you hear what Helen Webster has been saying?'

'I don't occupy myself with anything that Helen Webster says,' said Ann; and added, as she returned to her book: '*C'est une sale bête.*'

She was apparently oblivious of the storm that raged above her head, and turned a page in the middle of it with keen interest in what was on the other side. She had not quite kept to her determination to treat those who had put themselves beyond the pale of her forgiveness as if they didn't exist. But she could always take it up again. She took it up now, as Helen Webster supplied fuel to Mademoiselle's denunciations, and tried to get as many of the girls as possible to share in her indignation. Helen said things that would have 'drawn' her for a certainty the day before—things that Mademoiselle could hardly have understood, or they would have shocked her as much as Ann's speech had done. Ann blushed at them—she could never help that—but maintained a calm composure, and when Mademoiselle's horror had subsided to safety point looked up and asked with a shade of weariness: 'Can't we do a little geography, Mademoiselle? I have been reading about the town of Coventry; but I have finished now, and am ready to learn something new.'

Ann's absence of real offence against most of the girls in her class told gradually in her favour, and Helen Webster, to whom she never referred again, began

to show herself to them in her true colours. Her spite always had the effect of closing Ann's mouth, and her sallies were thus lost to the community, which had begun rather to enjoy them again, and was looking forward, now with some apprehension, to what would happen with Ann and her tea-parties after amicable relations should be renewed. Ann gained ground and Helen lost it, but there was little time for developments, and there were all sorts in the class. Helen was clever enough, or she would not have been their accepted leader before. She was able to keep up a good deal of irritation, and by the time Saturday came round Ann had not quite made up the ground that she had lost during the first day.

XIX

IN the dormitory, Helen Webster had Gertrude Knight to back her up, and Mabel Finney to encourage her, while pretending to keep her in check.

Mabel Finney had had a row royal with Margaret Parbury after morning school. She was going to leave at the end of the term, and allowed her disagreeable nature and her jealousy of Margaret to have full play.

She knew her duty as a monitor, she said, and would do it, thanking Margaret not to interfere. Margaret was taking a great deal too much on herself. She knew she had allowed Hilda Strangways to break Ann's Coventry the day before, which she had no right to do whatever, without consulting the other monitors, and it was an extra piece of assumption to send her up to *her* dormitory. If she wanted to know what was happening there, she could ask the head of it, and not set spies upon her; with a good deal more that caused

Margaret to turn from her in disgust, with the intimation that she should call a monitors' meeting about it.

The meeting was called after dinner, and did very little good. It was unfortunate that Hilda's unofficial embassy had been discovered. Legal Susan Norris felt obliged to take this point, and it interfered with her grasp of the case as a whole. She submitted that Hilda should be called as a witness, and this was done.

Hilda, who was feeling unstrung and emotional, was in a white heat of indignation over Ann's wrongs, and did not sufficiently distinguish between those which she alone knew of and those which the meeting had been called to discuss. Even Margaret thought she went too far in her advocacy, and Rosamund Felstead roundly accused her of 'slopping over' about Ann because she was pretty. She vehemently attacked Mabel Finney for what was going on in her dormitory, and then turned upon Mary Polegate, and included her in the denunciation. Good Mary Polegate was naturally scandalised at having any slur cast upon her blameless career, and rebutted the accusation, even going to the length of offering a weak defence of the speeches she had overheard, when Hilda repeated them.

Nora O'Brien looked at her, as if she saw her for the first time, and said: 'If that sort of thing is going on, and isn't being stopped, I vote we bring the Coventry to an end.'

Margaret would willingly have done this, as she could have told Miss Sutor, and got the hateful business over before the festivities of Saturday. But there was no majority for it, and the meeting ended in what was almost a wrangle, one side wanting the younger girls to be warned against attacks upon Ann, under the guise of talking about her, the other contending that she invited them herself.

Susan Norris came out rather strongly on the side

of the plaintiff here, advancing the plea that to talk *at* a girl in Coventry was the same thing as talking *to* her, and broke the letter as well as the spirit of the punishment. She argued it with forensic ability, but it was met by the counterplea that Ann broke all the rules of Coventry herself, and could not be allowed complete immunity of attack.

The decision arrived at was that *spiteful* attacks were to be discouraged; but it was very unsatisfactory, as no one had admitted to having encouraged such attacks, and Hilda had further upset the court by announcing, before she left the witness box, that there was no justice to be expected from it, and she should go to Coventry with Ann herself. It was not supposed that she had really meant this, but without the threat there would probably have been no decision at all.

But Hilda did mean it, and was glad enough to have the excuse for doing what she would have done the day before if the way had been clear.

Ann was at her violin lesson. There was no time to talk to her before they went up to change, and Hilda did not want to let her know of what she was going to do before she could explain to her how it had come about, and that no confidences had been broken. This she would have no opportunity of doing until just before tea-time, so Ann had to go through two further periods of purgatory in the dormitory before the relief was brought to her.

It need only be said of what went on, under the thinnest pretence of keeping to the monitors' decision from Mabel Finney, that one of the younger girls protested, and the other kept silence. Ann's own silence goaded her tormentors, and she went downstairs as white as a sheet.

But there she found Hilda waiting for her, and the very worst of her troubles were over. It was agreed

between them that she should stay at home the next afternoon until lesson time, which her pride would not have permitted her to do on her own initiative. With Hilda to support her, she was enabled to recover from the late attacks, which had almost broken her down, and had the triumph of making Nora O'Brien laugh at tea by assuming the airs of an invalid, pressing upon herself with anxious and tender solicitude spoonfuls of tea and very small pieces of bread and butter, and protesting at every mouthful that indeed she could not swallow another morsel. This comedy had the additional advantage of relieving her of making a meal, which she found difficult at this time.

Hilda's defiance of the decree of Coventry created a considerable impression, which was not entirely in Ann's favour. The spitefulness, against which her protest was supposed entirely to be made, was confined to a few, and to have Hilda openly on her side was considered by the flouted majority to balance what would otherwise have gained sympathy for her.

The much harassed Margaret, now faced with a complete rupture among the monitors, which reflected itself in the whole school, was indignant with Hilda for taking advantage of the well-intentioned breach of legality which they had secretly concerted between them.

'I can't help it, Margaret,' Hilda replied. 'I know I'm letting you down, and if everything were as it looked, you'd have a good right to complain. Perhaps you have as it is, but you know I wouldn't go against you without a very good reason, and when everything comes out you'll say I've been right. So don't be too angry with me, my dear. You won't be, when you know why I'm doing it.'

This was steering rather close to the danger point, but the original cause of all the trouble had receded

so far into the background that it was not to be expected that Margaret should guess the truth at this stage.

'What is there I don't know?' she asked. 'I don't think you ought to do this, Hilda, without telling me everything.'

'I can't tell you everything till it's all over. I wish I could, but I've promised Ann that I wouldn't. Poor lamb, I'm going to see her through the rest of it. I wish I had at the beginning.'

Margaret thought that there was some truth in what Rosamund had said—that Hilda was in danger of 'slopping over' about Ann, and turned from her rather impatiently. It was another trouble, added to the many she was undergoing; but it would be all over in two days now.

No official decree of Coventry was passed against Hilda. Those who would have liked to see it done were not in a strong enough position to withstand Margaret's angry statement that she had had enough of sending girls to Coventry, and that neither she nor Nora would observe it against Hilda. And Hilda was much too popular in the school to have made it possible, without re-opening the whole question in an aggravated form, when it was nearing the stage of settling itself. She kept very quiet during Friday and Saturday, and nobody need talk to her unless they wished to.

With these currents and cross-currents disturbing the school, they came to the night of the concert, and Ann's last ordeal.

XX

THE hall, on the night of the concert, bore an appearance of chaste festivity, which formed a fitting background for the assembled school, dressed in its best silks and

laces and muslins and ribbons, fluttering and tiptoeing with enjoyment.

Flowers were banked about the platform, but only at the end of the room was there any appearance of formality. There were no rows of seats, but the bigger tables had been cleared out, and enough chairs, arranged in groups, had been provided for the audience, which was to include no one not intimately connected with the school, with the exception of a friend of Miss Sutor's, on whose behalf she had asked for an invitation.

The invitation had, of course, been given, but it had a little thrown out one of the projected arrangements. Miss Sutor was to have had a chair of state in the middle of the hall, round which other chairs were to have radiated, and the older girls and the few guests were to have kept her company, changing places occasionally, and keeping up the idea of a musical party rather than that of a concert.

But it had only been necessary to change the chair of state for a sofa, upon which Miss Sutor and her friend could sit together. There was a small round table in front of it—the idea taken from pictures of entertainments at Windsor Castle—on which was a vase of flowers, and two programmes of the concert, with borders illuminated by Mary Polegate. She had offered to 'do' them herself, and when the offer had been warmly accepted, had said with a pious smile that she 'hoped nothing would happen to them this time.'

It was not known until Saturday morning that Mrs Angel, Miss Sutor's friend, was really Madame Angeli, the famous violinist, and the excitement of some girls who were expected to make their mark, and the nervousness of others who had admitted to a fear of breaking down, were greatly enhanced.

Edith Mackenzie, who was going on to the Royal

College of Music, expressed the liveliest terror, as she was the only violinist besides Ann; but she fully expected to be encored—had indeed pulled a few hidden strings so that she should be—and had visions of the distinguished lady asking indignantly why she should only have been put down for one piece, while an inferior performer and a much younger girl should have been put down for two. She really thought that she played better than Ann, and attributed the slight put upon her to favouritism. But M. Lanson had expressed himself in despair about Ann's playing during the past week, and she thought it would serve him quite right to be shown from a quarter which he could not ignore that he had made a bad mistake.

Ann, fortunately for her, did not know who the handsome, gray-haired woman sitting with Miss Sutor was, for in the state to which her nerves had been reduced, she expected to do no more than acquit herself creditably, and would have been unequal to the extra strain of trying to satisfy so great a musician as Madame Angeli.

Ann had eaten next to nothing for a week, and the varied emotions she had gone through, and the necessity she had considered herself under of maintaining a lively spirit before the school, and at least a calm one at home, had brought her very near to the end of her tether. She had awoke with a headache, but had been made to lie down in the afternoon, and was feeling rather better, although glad enough to sit quietly in a chair against the wall, with Hilda beside her.

Hilda's company was an inestimable comfort to her. She took her hand sometimes, when music was going on and nobody was looking, and gave it a squeeze. She couldn't think what she should have done if she had been condemned to sit by herself all the evening, while all the others were in friendly groups. The servants

were at the back of the hall, and Lizzie was with them. It would have gone hard with her pride if Lizzie had seen her shunned by all the girls of the school. And the people from outside must have noticed too, and wondered why she had no friends.

The Vicar's wife came and talked to her, and Hilda made the situation look natural, and also took the chief burden of the conversation on her shoulders. This was a great relief, as the Vicar's wife was shy and could only begin a conversation, and Ann would hardly have felt equal to the task of carrying it on when the Vicar's wife should reach the stage of wondering what she should say next. It was better when Miss Henderson came and sat with them. Of course she knew; but she talked quite naturally to Ann, and was kind to her, and Ann felt very grateful.

The time came for Ann to play her first piece. She looked more childish than ever as she went up on to the platform and tuned her violin to the note of M. Lanson, who was to accompany her. She wore a white muslin frock, the short skirt of which was much spread out, with pale blue sash and hair-ribbons, and bronze silk stockings and heelless shoes. Her neck and arms were bare. They were thin but beautifully modelled. She looked an extraordinary pretty child, but nothing more than a child, as she stood up before them to play.

The intervals between the songs and other pieces were longer than is usual at a set concert, to allow of conversation and moving about. This, and other details, had been very carefully thought out. Ann had gone up to the platform in a buzz of talk, which had concealed the fact that nobody had clapped her. But other girls had been applauded, as they had gone up to do their best, even when it was known that their best would not amount to much. She felt very much alone as she stood up before them all, heard the talk gradually

die away, and saw all the cold expectant eyes fixed upon her. She did not feel frightened, and knew that she would not break down in any way, but her head had suddenly begun to ache again, and there was a kind of numbness upon her, which made her feel as if it were somebody else who was playing, and as if she were unable to infuse any warmth into the performer.

Probably she had never played more correctly. The piece was Wieniawski's *Mazourka*, which she had practised over and over again, bar by bar, phrase by phrase, page by page. She felt that the person who was playing it could not possibly go wrong, or play at all out of tune, which interested her a little, as she knew it was not easy never to play any note the least little bit sharp or the least little bit flat. But though the tone was pure, it did not seem to be the voice of her Nicola Gagliano that was speaking. It was not so rich, and was much more monotonous. There was no life in it.

After a time, Ann felt so sure that the person who was playing the *Mazourka* could be trusted not to hurt her ears with doubtful notes or uncertain bowing, although she was evidently incapable of playing it as she had sometimes played it herself, that she allowed herself to look at the audience.

The eyes were still cold, and some of them were wandering; there was even a little murmur of talk beginning to be heard. She met the look of the gray-haired lady sitting on the sofa with Miss Sutor. It was interested, but a trifle impatient. A message seemed to come to her from it that she was to prick up the person who was playing to be more alive. She tried to do so, but seemed unable to convey the message, and there was no response. The piece ended in the same clear but dead way in which it had been played throughout.

Ann seemed to wake up as the last notes of the piano

sounded, and knew that M. Lanson was furious with her. 'You didn't try,' he said, with an angry frown, as he handed her the music to put away. 'If you don't play better next time, I will not teach you any more.' Only one other person in the hall knew how well she really had played, but he was the only person who knew how much better she *could* play.

Ann was too glad to have got the first piece over to care much what he said. Her head was aching badly, and she wanted to go and sit quietly by Hilda, but had to put her violin and bow back in their case, which seemed to her an intolerable piece of drudgery.

The applause which had followed her performance had been purely perfunctory from the majority of the audience. As she went down from the platform, and back to her seat by Hilda, the talk had begun again, and she was already forgotten. Sensitive as she was to impressions, she knew that there was no affectation in this ignoring of her. The interests and excitements of the day had driven her from the minds which she had occupied for more than a week. She would occupy them again shortly, but for the present she was nothing to them.

Her isolation struck her more painfully than almost any episode of the punishment she had taken upon herself. In ordinary circumstances, she would have been deep in all that had gone on in preparation for the great event, and would have afforded, perhaps, more help than anybody. She had made herself a personage, and could have offered more than the rest. But it had all been done without her. Nobody had wanted her help, and nobody had wanted her interest. This was the true Coventry, and she felt it more than she had felt all but the worst of the unkindness to which she had been subjected. It seemed to her that it must go on after the truth came to be known. None

of the girls whose companionship she had so enjoyed really cared for her, or would care for her any more.

Except one. As she took her seat again by the side of Hilda, she felt to the full what it was to have a friend.

XXI

EDITH MACKENZIE was loudly applauded as she went on to the platform. She bowed and smiled with great assurance, and tuned her violin loudly. Its tone was rough, and hurt Ann's delicate ear, so that she shut her eyes in pain, and was observed to shut them by some who were watching her.

The piece was Raff's *Cavatina*, and Edith Mackenzie played it well for a young amateur. But she seemed to Ann to be tearing whatever feeling there was in it to tatters. Her ear, sublimated by the nervous tension she was undergoing, and the pain in her head, was jarred by every falsity and every roughness, and when it came to the double stopping, where the player put forth all her powers, it was almost torture to her. She closed her eyes again and leant her head back with a look of suffering. This also was observed, and was considered to be a piece of acting. Ann had acted so much during the past week.

But whatever Ann felt about the performance, it delighted the school, who applauded it rapturously, and insisted upon an encore. M. Lanson scowled, and tried to prevent it, but this was put down to jealousy on behalf of his favourite pupil, and the applause increased until he had to give way. Madame Angeli had evidently been impressed. The girls had all watched her, and she had been seen to smile kindly, in a way she had not done to Ann; and she had certainly clapped Edith for longer than she had clapped Ann.

As Edith Mackenzie was preparing for her repeat performance, Mabel Finney came over to Ann, and said: 'You are to behave yourself properly. We are all sick of you and your airs.'

'What do you mean? What are you talking about?' demanded Hilda, firing up, while Ann flushed, but looked bewildered.

'All the time Edith has been playing, she has been pretending to be disgusted. Edith clapped *her*, and that's what she does in return, the little cat!' She returned to her seat with indignation.

'I wasn't pretending anything. My head hurts,' said Ann, as Edith Mackenzie began to play again.

It was a simpler piece, and she played it more quietly. Ann was enabled to listen without distress, and join in the applause at the end, but it was not only her head that was hurting her. She would hardly have thought it possible that anything that Mabel Finney could have said would have given her that kind of pain. But the group she had rejoined was eyeing her in watchful disfavour. It contained one or two girls who had taken no part in the attacks upon her, but they must have thought that she was capable of doing that, just as Mabel Finney did, and disliked her for it. Some of them were whispering to other groups, and more of them were watching her, with the same disfavour. They would put it all about the room that she had acted disgust at Edith's playing—out of jealousy, of course; and no one would believe that she would have been incapable of such a thing. None of them had wanted her during the day, and she had been completely forgotten. Now she was being brought to their notice again, and all the feeling they had for her was one of censure and dislike.

An interval came during which lemonade was handed round. A small girl, very proud of her curled and

flounced perfection, carried a tray to the quarter in which Ann and Hilda were sitting. Ann wanted a drink badly, but she had announced her intention of touching nothing that had been provided for the entertainment. She had even brought her own supper—a few cakes with which she might make play at the table. She had announced this intention too, giving as part reason that she was afraid they might want to poison her food. She was far from such audacities now. They had done her very little good after all, as the girls disliked her just the same.

She plucked up spirit to say: 'No, thank you,' as the small girl showed that she was going to pass her.

'I wasn't going to ask you,' said the small girl, with a look of high disdain; and this also hurt her. She had always been 'nice' to the small girls, giving them their share of the sweets she brought to school, pulling their hair in a friendly way if it happened to be ready to her hand, swinging them in the garden, to an extent that few would take the trouble to do, and never trying to exclude them from garden games. They had run after her, for this and other purposes, and her popularity among them had been as great as among her own companions. But that was all forgotten now. They disliked her as much as the rest.

She told Hilda she thought she would go and get a glass of water, but Hilda said she was to sit still, and went out to get it for her. Rosamund Felstead came up to her and said, with rather a shamefaced air: 'It's nothing to do with your being in Coventry, but the girls think that Edith ought to play again instead of you. Madame Angeli liked her playing, and must think it odd that you should play twice and she only once.'

Edith had already played twice, but Ann was only too pleased that she should play a third time, or even

a fourth, if she could arouse enough enthusiasm. 'I don't mind at all,' she said.

'Well, will you ask M. Lanson?'

Ann didn't want to get up, or to draw any attention to herself by moving about the room, but she said: 'I will, if you'll tell them I didn't pretend not to like Edith's playing. I shut my eyes because of my head, which hurts.'

There were dark shadows under her eyes. 'Yes, I saw that,' said Rosamund, relenting in a gush of tenderness towards her. 'Poor darling, it will be all over for you to-night.'

Ann had no use for her belated tenderness, and made her way to M. Lanson, who had just changed his position, and was talking vivaciously to Madame Angeli.

M. Lanson seemed to have forgotten his late annoyance with her, for when he saw her standing by him he said: 'Ah, this is my little pupil who has the beautiful Nicola Gagliano, and plays it so well when she is in the mood.' He took her hand and drew her towards Madame Angeli.

It was Madame Angeli who kissed a fellow-artist, in the sight of Edith Mackenzie, who had not yet been presented to her, and the whole school; but it was Mrs Angel, with children of her own, who said: 'Why, what a pale face and dark eyes! Don't you feel well, dear?'

'My head hurts a little,' said Ann. 'Monsieur Lanson, auriez-vous la bonté de faire jouer Edith Mackenzie a ma place la prochaine fois?'

M. Lanson laughed—he still had hold of Ann's hand. 'You didn't like what I said to you,' he said. 'She is a proud child this, Madame, and I scolded her for not trying. But she is going to try the next time, and you shall hear what you *shall* hear in that quite little piece.'

Madame Angeli said : 'Edith Mackenzie plays very nicely, but I want to hear you again'; and Mrs Angel added : 'Just that one little piece, dear, and we won't bother you to play again if you don't feel up to it.'

Ann reported the failure of her mission to Rosamund Felstead, who received it without a word, offended once more over the rejection of her kindness, and carried it to the rest, who were also offended. M. Lanson had been seen to laugh when Ann put her question, and he had held her hand, and presented her to Madame Angeli. It was sickening to see an old man, who *ought* to know what good playing was, so blinded by favouritism. He must have been lauding Ann up to the skies, or Madame Angeli wouldn't have kissed her. It had looked as if he had *asked* Madame Angeli which she would rather hear; and what could she have said? But of course it was just like Ann to ask him in front of her, instead of waiting till he had left her.

It was not in the least like Ann, who still had no idea that the kind, gray-haired woman was the famous Madame Angeli, although Rosamund had mentioned her name; but she was made to feel during the next half-hour that hostility against her had increased.

Well, she wouldn't give in to it any more. She had done what they had asked her, and they could only show that they hated her all the more. She didn't care now if they hated her or not, and she would show them that she didn't by the way she would play. There would be opportunities for expressing defiance in d'Ambrosio's *Canzonetta*, which was to be her second piece. And she must try to please M. Lanson, who was a tiresome old creature, but had taken a lot of trouble to teach her, and who trusted her to do so; also the kind gray-haired lady, who was evidently fond of music.

XXII

WHEN her time came, she went on to the platform with her head held high. The piano part which she put before M. Lanson shook as she set it on the rack, and he saw it, but thought he must have been mistaken when she tuned her violin with a firm bow, and got more tone out of it than she had done anywhere in the piece she had already played.

Her face was quite white as she stood up before them all, in the graceful attitude of the born violin player, of whom the instrument seems almost part of the body, so beautiful and natural are the curves which it demands from arm and wrist and fingers, while the bow is held lightly poised, ready to bring out all the strange sweetness hoarded up in it. Her eyes seemed enormous. She was no longer only a pretty child. Perhaps she was not pretty at all at that moment. She was a soul in revolt and pain. The talk which had accompanied her preparation, rather louder than usual, as if it were intended to continue, died away completely. They all looked at her. It was Ann against the school now, and something must come of this. Either they would conquer her, or she them.

A few bars from the piano, and she struck into the half gay, half plaintive opening *motif*, and pursued it boldly through its flow and returns, which were now challenging, now almost impudent, now relenting, and now challenging again. Madame Angeli leaned forward, and her eyes were alight. This was very different from the playing of the Mazourka. The bowing and fingering were just as sure, but the tone was twice as great; it was extraordinary that such life and fire should be produced from that small light figure.

To the girls in the hall, who had so applauded Edith

Mackenzie's calculated raptures, Ann also had something to say. She was not asking for their applause. She was telling them that she didn't want it, and wanted them as little as they wanted her. Not all of them understood it, but a good many did, and all of them listened to her as if fascinated. Edith Mackenzie, having something of the artist in her, suddenly grew ashamed of her own late performance, and wondered what Madame Angeli must be thinking of her now; then, as it seemed improbable that she was thinking of her at all, what she was thinking of Ann; and made up her mind that she would lead the applause at the end of the piece, Coventry or no Coventry.

Ann came to the charming short second *motif*, which was played a little slower than the first. The double notes rang out clear and sweet and true, and M. Lanson, sitting at the piano, turned his head and looked at Madame Angeli, with a wide grin of pure pleasure, and a shake of his white locks. What did she think of *that*? He had told her how well Ann could play—'if she liked.' But it seemed she never had liked before, and he had known nothing about it.

Madame Angeli did not respond to him. Her eyes were fixed upon Ann. She would not have missed this for anything, but she did not understand what was producing it, nor the change that was coming over Ann's face as she played the mournful ending of the second *motif*.

It was as white and set as ever, but something was happening to the eyes, which looked so dark in it. As Ann returned with as much dash as before to the first *motif*, a tear dropped from one of them on to the violin, which was immediately followed by a tear from the other. A crimson flush crept up over the pallor, and more tears came dropping, dropping. But there was no change in the expression of her face, nor in the

mastery with which she played. She had once boasted that nobody in the school should ever see her 'upset some tears.' But now she was crying before them all. They had broken through all her defences at last, helped by her own music, which had betrayed her. The tears came against her will. She could not help them falling, but they did not mean that she was giving in, though she was now defenceless. She would defy them till the last.

XXIII

'BRAVA! brava!' cried M. Lanson, hardly waiting till he had played the last note of the accompaniment, and sprang up as if he would embrace Ann before them all. The applause of Madame Angeli, and of the whole school, which knew that Ann had played magnificently, and was stricken with compunction at the strange sight of her tears, was mingled with this incipient comedy.

But Ann had already escaped. She did not bow to the audience, but turned away the moment the last long harmonic, which she carried to the end, was finished, leaving out the two pizzicato notes, and putting her violin down anywhere went out through the door on the platform.

Hilda, who had been almost unbearably moved by the sight of Ann's tears, and all that she alone knew that they meant, slipped out of a door that was near her and ran to find Ann. She found her half-sitting, half-lying on a bench in the cloak-room in a paroxysm of sobbing. She was nothing but a hurt child again now, who had come quite to the end of her resources.

As Hilda knelt beside her and tried to raise her head, where it lay on her outstretched arm, Lizzie burst into the room, in a strong heat of sympathy and indignation.

'There, Miss Ann, dear,' she said, 'don't cry any more. I know all about it, and I say it's *disgraceful* the way you've been treated. I shall tell her ladyship the moment we get home.'

Ann's sobs were increasing in violence. She would not let Hilda raise her, and was too far gone to turn upon the faithful Lizzie, who adjured her again to leave off crying, and said it was a shame. 'I've heard all about it, Miss,' she said to Hilda. 'I don't know whether *you* know the rights of it or not. They say you're the only one who's been kind to the poor child, but——'

'Oh, yes, I do,' said Hilda; and Ann recovered herself enough, at hearing herself called a child by Lizzie, to sob out: 'Be quiet, and go away.'

Margaret Parbury came in. She looked very concerned when she saw the group of them. Hilda had lifted Ann up by force, and was sitting by her on the bench, holding her. But Ann was still sobbing violently. 'Miss Sutor has sent me to fetch her,' Margaret said.

Lizzie turned upon her. 'She's not in a fit state to be fetched, as you can plainly see, Miss,' she said. 'And now you *do* see, I hope you're proud of what you and the rest have brought her to. I know she's cried herself to sleep every night for a week, and she's ate next to nothing; but she wouldn't tell me nothing of what it was all about, and wouldn't let me tell her ladyship neither. But now I know she's been treated downright *crool*, and I wish I'd——'

'I want to go home,' wailed Ann. 'Stop talking and fetch the carriage.'

'Listen, Ann,' said Margaret. 'It's all over now. I was sitting next to Miss Sutor, and I told her, and she said she shouldn't ask anything more. So stop crying and come back with me. Madame Angeli wants to thank you for playing so well.'

'I want to go home,' sobbed Ann. 'Lizzie, why

can't you f-fetch the carriage, instead of standing there like a st-uck p-ig?'

The fact that she should use an English image seemed to indicate that she was coming to herself. She was allowing Hilda to dry her eyes now, but her sobs continued almost as violently as before.

'She never done it at all,' said Lizzie to Margaret. 'It was Miss Hilda as did it, as well I know myself, for they quarrelled about it in the public street, and would have come to blows if I hadn't up and said I'd tell her ladyship, and stopped them.'

'Be *quiet*, I tell you,' cried Ann; but Hilda said: 'Ann dear, it's all over now, and Lizzie has told the maids; there's no reason to keep it to yourself any longer. Hilda Lang did it, Margaret, and Ann knew that if she said *she* didn't, it would be the same as telling of Hilda. I found it out, but she wouldn't let me tell you.'

'Which I call *noble* of Miss Ann,' said Lizzie, 'and what's she's had to go through for it nobody will ever know but me, be they who they may.'

'*Will* you be quiet and go and fetch the carriage?' cried Ann. 'I haven't minded at all since Hilda knew—except a little; and I cried because my head hurt me, and if they think I cried because of them, I didn't.'

The tears of which Ann spoke in the past tense were still very much of the present, but they were quieter now, and she leant against Hilda without trying to get away.

Margaret's face had changed during the process of enlightenment. 'Oh, why didn't I think of that?' she said, in distress. 'I did think at first that Hilda Lang must have done it. I'm so sorry, Ann, if I was unkind to you. So will everybody be.'

'You weren't unkind,' sobbed Ann. 'You were very gentle to me, and so was Nora yesterday. I like you both best after Hilda.'

She clung to Hilda now, and her storm of crying subsided, as if she was beginning to feel the relief that had been brought to her.

'She was that angry with Miss Hilda, when she heard what she done,' pursued Lizzie, still loyal and indignant, 'that it was as much as I could do to make her be'ave herself. As if *she'd* do a thing like that, indeed! You ought to have known better, Miss, and all the young ladies. Why, the names she called Miss Hilda was something awful! All right, Miss Ann, dear, I'll run straight down and fetch the carriage and take you 'ome. I'm sure Mr Robins will put the horses in at once—for *you*—even if he's having his supper. *We're* only servants,' added Lizzie, with high pride, as she prepared to go, 'but none of *us* wouldn't believe that Miss Ann could *ever* do anything nasty.'

Ann refused to go back into the hall, and Hilda would not press her. But Margaret said: 'I'm going to tell everybody how it was, Ann. You know how sorry they'll be. Couldn't you just come in for a little, to show them that you haven't gone away angry?'

'You can tell them I don't inquiet myself any more,' said Ann. 'I don't want to go in there before everybody.'

Margaret had brought cold water, and Hilda was bathing Ann's eyes and forehead, which made her feel better every moment, though her head still ached badly.

'You shan't if you don't want to,' said Margaret. 'I'll tell Miss Sutor and Madame Angeli that you're not well enough.'

'Is that the true Madame Angeli?' asked Ann, enlightenment coming to her from the collection of pictures she had seen. 'Why didn't you tell me, Hilda?'

'I thought it would upset you if you knew you had to play before her.'

'I wish I'd known,' said Ann. 'I would have tried

to play better. I was thinking all the time about being at Coventry.'

'You won't think about that any more, will you?' said Margaret. 'We shall all try to make it up to you. We shall be horribly sorry when we remember all that happened.'

'I don't want you to be too sorry, Margaret,' said Ann, 'or I shan't be able to make any more pleasantries about it.' The first faint smile appeared on her face. 'I made some rather good ones, didn't I?'

Margaret felt more like crying than laughing, but she smiled too. 'I'm afraid I didn't appreciate them quite enough at the time,' she said. 'Can't you make up a little pleasantry now, Ann, for me to tell the girls?'

'I'm afraid I'm too tired now,' said Ann. 'But perhaps I will go back till the carriage comes. I should like to say some words to Madame Angeli. I suppose she will see that I've been crying, but I told her that my head hurt, and if she thinks I'm a baby for crying about that I must support the consequences.'

XXIV

THE truth had already spread among the girls in the hall. A maid who had heard Lizzie's story had told one of them. It went from group to group, and little attention was paid to the subsequent performers. So quick was the revulsion of feeling, that Mabel Finney and Helen Webster, and a few others were feeling themselves outcasts well before the concert was over, Susan Norris was digesting a lesson in the small value to be placed on circumstantial evidence, and good Mary Polegate had already said three times that she was thankful now that she had never borne any malice towards Ann.

Miss Henderson heard the story, and told it shortly to Miss Sutor, who breathed a deep sigh of relief as the burden she had felt increasingly during the last few

days was rolled off her shoulders. Her school would not have been the same without that naughty, fascinating Ann bringing her bright face and impudent ways to it every morning. She had been wondering how she could get out of her threat to tell Lady Sinclair of Ann's last escapade, and had let the Coventry go on for the full week more to give her an excuse to say that Ann had been punished enough than because she was blind to the serious disturbance it was creating.

But part of her burden had been in believing, as she had been bound to believe, that Ann had done an unkind as well as a mischievous trick. Miss Henderson, who had always been unaccountably blind to Mary Polegate's virtues, had made light of it, and laid stress on the fact that Ann had not meant to spoil the chart altogether. But when all had been said in her favour that could be said, there still remained something about the whole affair which showed Ann in a light that Miss Sutor had not seen her in before, and she had shrunk from examining her in that light. It touched her deeply now, to learn that the poor child had run such a gauntlet to protect the real culprit. She had seen for herself how deceptive her brave airs of not caring had been. That was the real Ann—quixotic and courageous; she had felt all along that there was something about the other one which did not fit in.

Ann came into the hall with Margaret and Hilda as the concert was nearing its end. Hilda joined a group of her friends, and Margaret went with Ann to the seat of state.

Nora O'Brien had just sung an Irish song, and the applause which had begun to die away renewed itself as the three girls came in, whether for them or her was not apparent. But Miss Sutor asked for another song from her, and by the time she had got back on to the platform Ann was ensconced in the middle of the sofa, safe from any possible demonstration.

Her violent fit of weeping, and by now atrocious headache, had given her such an appearance that kind Mrs Angel forgot all about everything except the necessity of saving her from further stress. She put her arm round her, and said: 'I have a girl just as old as you. When she has a headache she snuggles up to her old mother and tries to go to sleep. So I think you had better see whether that will cure yours. Miss Sutor is going to take me to see your grandmother to-morrow, and I shall bring my violin and play to you. But I shan't play any better than you did, Ann.'

Ann closed her eyes with a delicious sensation of happiness and relief, in spite of her pain, and fell asleep instantly. She slept the sleep of utter exhaustion throughout Nora's song, the applause which followed it, the two final events of the programme, and the National Anthem. She would have slept through anything, and could not be wakened when Lizzie, ever faithful, and still bridling with indignation, announced the arrival of the carriage to take her home.

Miss Henderson carried her down to it—as gym mistress, of course, with a notorious muscular development. It was said afterwards, when the effect of Miss Sutor's birthday was wearing off, and the light of humour was beginning to play around her again, that she and Miss Henderson had quarrelled as to which of them should do it. But this was not true, and as Ann disliked references to her having been carried at all—like a baby—the story was dropped.

The morning after the concert, Gertrude Knight found a parcel just above her pigeon-hole in the cloak-room. It contained the cakes which Ann had brought for her supper. She was already ashamed of her part in the late affair, and thought it would be kinder to Ann to remove all unpleasant reminders of it. So she ate them.

THE BOOKKEEPER

I

IN that maze of narrow streets that used to lie to the north of the Strand, before the modern improvements swept most of them away, was a grocer's shop, on the name-board of which was painted 'Joseph Cummins.' It was rather a mean little shop, smelling of soap and tallow, but it provided a decent living for its tenant and his wife and child.

Joseph Cummins was a man of poor education but large views, and a passion for expressing them. They ranged loosely over all social and political questions that were alive at that time, but a few years after the birth of his son concentrated themselves on a sort of enraged secularism, and a corresponding hatred for all manifestations of religion. The real difficulties of Christianity hardly affected him, but he was diligent in searching out small discrepancies in the Bible, which he studied with fierce ardour to that end. He was one of the most regular of the Hyde Park orators, and was sometimes mobbed by outraged supporters of revealed truth for the outspoken contempt with which he treated their beliefs. When this happened he felt pride in suffering for righteousness' sake, and his hatred of Christianity grew and grew.

His wife, who indulged in a mild but obstinate observance of religion, never combated his views, but insisted that the child should not be nurtured in them. The Catholic revival was then beginning to infect the

Church of England, and near the quarter where they lived was a large church in the forefront of the movement. She attended this church, and, without being deeply affected by the doctrines taught, enjoyed the ritual, and sent her child to take part in whatever was done there for the training or education of children. He was a quiet, well-behaved little boy, and a favourite with the clergy. When he was old enough he was made an acolyte, which caused great content to his mother, and an outburst of bitter scorn from his father.

He was sent to a cheap commercial school, where he learnt nothing except to read and write, and to deal in an elementary way with figures, for which he showed considerable aptitude. At the age of thirteen he was taken away from school, and, through the interest of one of the clergy at St Barnabas, obtained a place as office boy in a shipping firm in the city. The grocery business had already begun to decline, owing to his father's increasing immersion in more serious affairs, and part of his small earnings he had to contribute from the first to the expenses of the home.

He was conscientious and obliging, and after a year or two was promoted to a junior clerkship. His education had not helped him to the initiative that he lacked by nature, but his accuracy and diligence made him a good clerk. He learnt bookkeeping in the evenings, and presently rose to be bookkeeper to the firm, at a respectable salary.

In the meantime his father's business continued to dwindle, and after the death of his mother, which happened when he was twenty-two, was sold for a small sum. Thenceforward he kept his father, who now devoted himself entirely to his crusade against the Christian religion.

His own religion he followed in the same spirit of careful duty which he brought to bear upon his work.

The church stood to him for all the social life he knew; for the calls on his purse did not permit of his joining in the pursuits of his fellow-clerks, among whom he was something of a butt, on account of his simplicity of mind and speech, and his unswerving self-restraint. But they liked him none the less; and he remained a favourite with the clergy of St Barnabas, and especially with the Vicar, a man of great force of character. He undertook everything in connection with the church that he was asked to undertake, but proved to be of no use in teaching children, or in controlling the rough youths who were gathered in to the clubs and classes. So they employed him about the church itself, and Sunday was a happy day for him, from the first service in the darkness of the early morning, or after dawn, until the lights were put out at night.

His conscience troubled him when his father, leaving off all pretence of working for a living, devoted himself entirely to his anti-religious propaganda. Was it right that he should give him the opportunity of doing so by his support of him?

He took his difficulty to the Vicar, who calmed his fears, but made an opportunity of speaking to the windy atheist. He got little but abuse for his pains, but was able to satisfy the son that the Christian Faith would not suffer from such attacks as the father could only make upon it.

When he was twenty-six, he fell in love with a girl in the tea-shop he frequented in the city. She was a mild, gentle creature, and he thought her very beautiful. He admired her for a year before they became closer friends. She was the third daughter of a theatrical family, the father of which was a stage-carpenter, the mother a dresser, and the two elder daughters ladies of the ballet. They were hard-working, respectable people, and she only had not followed in the

footsteps of her sisters because of her slighter physique.

They became engaged, but although his income was now large enough for him to have been able to marry, there was his father to be considered. So they waited patiently, without any thought of shaking off that encumbrance.

She had not been brought up to church-going, but she went with him to St Barnabas, and was proud of her lover as, in scarlet cassock and lace-edged cotta, his simple face unusually grave, he held up the great processional cross, and paced with slow steps round the church at the head of the singing boys and men.

His father fell ill, and it was a great comfort to him that he consented to see his friend, the Vicar, and, falling into great fear of death and what should come afterwards, was reconciled to the Church, and made a good end. He felt no shadow of doubt that all his father's sins had been washed away, and the harm that he had done in his life completely wiped out.

A year later, when he had paid off his father's debts, he was married. They found a little house not far from the church, but soon afterwards the Vicar made his submission to the Church of Rome, and they began to think of moving to a less crowded quarter. Londoners born, as both of them were, they hankered after the country joys of which they had tasted during their short honeymoon, and on holiday excursions to Kew, Richmond, and Hampstead.

The Vicar's 'going over' had disturbed him; he had thoughts of 'going over' too, and for a time was unhappy. The controversy that seethed around him hardly affected him; he knew very little of what other churches and other religious bodies taught and believed, and had never speculated on matters of doctrine. He had been happy in practising such religious duties as

were enjoined upon him, and if those about him had talked bitterly and contemptuously of other forms of belief he had sat silent, and felt only discomfort.

He looked up to the Vicar as a very holy, learned man, but shrank from plunging into new and untried waters. His mind had been at peace for a long time, and he was sure that the happiness he now enjoyed—the satisfaction he found in his daily work, the love and companionship of his home, the freedom from anxiety over money, which had come about since his father's death, and the interest and colour he gained from his association with St Barnabas—all sprang from a divine source; and he came to feel that he would be showing ingratitude if he turned his back upon the means through which his blessings had come to him.

So he said good-bye to the Vicar, sad at losing a friend, but without any expression of a desire to see him again, and once more regained his serenity.

A few months later, he and his wife set up their home in a little villa in the new suburb of Greenleys.

II

A FEW years before, Greenleys had been a place of large comfortable red-brick or white-painted houses, hugging their seclusion behind high walls or thick shrubberies. There were green fields, where you could find primroses in the spring, and where hay was cut in the summer. The few shops were on either side of a strip of green, at the end of which was an inn, with a painted sign standing out boldly on the edge of the roadway, and a wooden trough beneath it. Here the horses drawing the early market carts from the gardens

beyond used to drink, while their drivers regaled themselves inside, or in sunny weather on benches under the latticed windows.

But the nearer London suburbs were already doomed, and Greenleys was one of the first to be nibbled at by the speculative builder. A London banker died, and his large house, with its twenty or thirty acres of garden and orchard and meadow, came into the market. If another rich man had bought it, the devastation might have been averted for a few years longer. But the ground was too valuable; there was a great army of small people demanding to be housed within reach of their daily work in the great city; and it is profitable to house such people, who are content with so little in the way of space, and pay so much more for it in proportion than the rich man. So streets of little villas, each with its patch of garden in front and its fenced-in space behind, sprang up where the cedars and velvety lawns, and the apple-trees and deep meadows had been; and no sooner was the paint dry on their woodwork than some London clerk, or small business man, eager to live 'a little way out' took possession of them.

The bookkeeper and his wife thought themselves fortunate in securing one of a row of houses so small and so cheap that at that time there was nothing to equal them near London within touch of fields and hedgerows. It was in Cedar Lane, so called because in one of the little back gardens was a fine tree saved from the wreck of the rich man's grounds. At the bottom of their own garden was a group of lilacs, which flowered profusely in early summer, and of which they were immensely proud. All the houses in Cedar Lane were snapped up before they were finished, and within a month of the final rolling down of the roadway, the lane had the air of a long-established street, where

life was regular and ordered, and certain things happened at certain hours of the day.

Early in the morning the great exodus began, and went on for an hour or more. Men dressed in black coats and tall hats—every self-respecting clerk wore a tall hat in those days—would come out of the little houses, clang to the front gates, and sometimes with a farewell wave to the wives who stood at the door, sometimes with a glance back at the windows, or at the wallflowers or pansies in the little strips behind the iron railings, would hurry off to their day's work. Mixed with the black-coated men were the children going to school, who sometimes accompanied them to the end of the lane; and sometimes the wives, if they were newly married, walked with them. The lane, between eight and nine, was full of hurrying figures, coming from its own houses, or passing through it from those beyond; and the clang of the iron gates sounded continuously, like musket fire in the battle which all these men were waging—the battle for food and shelter, for themselves and those dependent on them, and perhaps for something more in the future.

Soon after nine o'clock the exodus would cease. There were no more males to be seen in Cedar Lane, except the boys with the butchers' trays and the bakers' and grocers' baskets, but only women and little nursemaids and babies' perambulators. And for the rest of the day the sun would shine upon a place almost as quiet as it had been when the bees had hummed about the flower-beds, and the thrushes had carolled in the blossoming lilacs that had been where the houses now were.

In the evening the breadwinners would return, and the garden gates go on opening and shutting until every one was gathered in, with one more day's work finished, and a few hours of home-life won from the

never-ceasing struggle. And where only the night wind had breathed over the lawns and trees and flowers, there were a thousand living influences—love, care, joy, sorrow, fear, innocence, hope, youth looking forward, age looking back—and in every little house a human story as interesting as any that the big house, now gone, had contained.

Every morning, shortly before nine o'clock, the bookkeeper, who was now about five-and-thirty, and his wife, who was some eight or nine years younger, would come out of a house in the middle of the row, to which she would return by herself a quarter of an hour later. Every evening at about six o'clock she would come out again and return with him. On summer evenings they might come out again a little later and walk in the fields, which were rapidly being swallowed up by streets and streets of such houses as had been built in Cedar Lane, or by houses a little bigger. On winter evenings the door would shut on them, not to be opened again until the next morning.

Every Sunday they went twice to the Parish Church. During the first years of their residence, before the small houses had taken the place of most of the big ones, it was fashionably attended, and more important men than the bookkeeper filled its few offices. The Rector did not visit except among the older residents. He was a fluent preacher, and the two humble members of his congregation who were always in their seats in the gallery on Sunday mornings and evenings, and at the week-night service, were among his most appreciative hearers, although they had never spoken to him.

There were no early communion services at this church, and one of the curates at St Barnabas, who visited them soon after they had settled at Greenleys, professed himself shocked at their being content with such churchgoing as they now practised. They ought,

he said, at least to make a point of going to early mass, even if they preferred to attend their parish church later in the day. So they went in to St Barnabas every Sunday morning very early, as long as the summer lasted, walking a mile and then taking a tram, and not breakfasting until they reached home again. Then they gave it up, because the wife was getting near her confinement and the long journey without food was too much for her. They became attached to the Parish Church, for the music was good, and they thought the preaching was; and they liked to go out of their house and join a stream of churchgoers, most of whom they knew at least by sight, and to feel that they were one of a large family.

The child was born some hours before it was expected. He received a telegram at his office, and with some misgiving asked for leave of absence, which was at once granted to him, as in all the twenty years of his service he had never been away from his work for an hour, except at the appointed times of holiday.

He hurried home as fast as he could, with a feeling of terror and dreariness at his heart. Surely he would not have been sent for if there had not been serious danger!

But when he reached the house he was told that a daughter had been born to him, and his wife had come through her confinement well. He burst into tears, at which he was much ashamed, and not a little surprised, for his sensations were only those of great happiness.

When he had calmed himself, he was allowed to go up and see his wife, who smiled at him, and showed him the little dark head in the hollow of her shoulder.

He was greatly moved, and felt like weeping again, but controlled himself, and when he was alone again knelt down and thanked God for His wonderful goodness, and promised to bring up the child as His servant.

III

THEY called the child Mary. His wife's mother and sisters came to the christening, and brought gifts. The two former dancers were now married, and had left the stage, but their talk was all of theatrical matters. They admired the baby, and prophesied a glorious career for her behind the footlights. It was their highest idea of success in life, and they meant to be nothing but complimentary and encouraging. But to him, feeding on visions of his child brought up in a garden enclosed, untouched by any spot of worldliness, their anticipations seemed unclean and degrading. He was glad when they went away and left him alone with his wife and child.

It would be impossible to imagine any one happier than he was now. There was nothing in life he could have desired that he had not. He came home from his work every evening with the brightest anticipations of pleasure. He loved the tiny infant so much that the place in which she was seemed irradiated. On Sundays, when he awoke and realised that he would not have to leave her for a whole day, he had an access of the keenest joy. And yet his work was done better, if that were possible, that it had ever been. His whole being expanded with happiness. His brain was keener, his bodily health more assured. The attitude of his fellow-clerks, who had always liked him in a half-contemptuous way, insensibly changed towards him. His simplicity was touched with a spiritual light, and it would have seemed almost irreverence to belittle it.

As the years went on, the halo of brightness only seemed to surround him more brightly. The child grew into a lovely, gentle, smiling little creature, whose

life knew no shadows, so devotedly was she cared for by father and mother alike.

They kept her a great deal to themselves. The children of the few neighbours whom they knew seemed to them rough and dirty, unworthy to be associated with the white purity of their cherished little one. Other mothers became jealous of her, and said she was being brought up above her station. And, indeed, they spent more on her dainty clothes than on their own, and more, but for the bare simplicity of their lives, than they could have afforded.

She returned them all the love they lavished on her. She would sit on her father's knee, snuggling up to him, in that corner of the little garden where the blossoming lilac made a retired bower, and he would tell her Bible stories—about Adam and Eve walking in a garden, full of bright, sweet-scented flowers, a garden from which no houses could be seen, and where God Himself walked with them in the cool of the evening; about Joseph and his bright coat, and his dreams, and the jealousy of his brothers; about the infant Samuel, and how God called him in the night, and he answered; about David, the young shepherd, who played beautifully upon the harp, and killed the giant with a stone from his sling; about the poor little Mephibosheth, who was lame of both his feet, and from being very poor and in hiding came to be treated as the King's son that he was; about Ruth in the cornfields, and Esther in the King's palace; and about the child Jesus, and the love that his mother bore him, and of His loving little children afterwards. But he told her none of the stories of fighting and murder and passion, for although he accepted all these as part of God's way with man, and as handed down for our instruction, he held them unfit as yet for those tender ears.

When she was old enough her mother began to teach

her little lessons; but the children of humble folk are not allowed to be so taught, and after the visit of a school inspector it became necessary to send her to school. Most of the neighbours' children went to the elementary Church school, but they shrank from sending her there to mix with the rest, and perhaps to learn bad words and bad habits. So they sent her to a lady who had been a governess, and taught half a dozen little girls in her own house. The education was not nearly so good as at the elementary school, and it cost them money besides, though not very much. The mother always accompanied her to and fro, and of the few children who were her schoolfellows a careful selection was made of two whom she might sometimes play with.

When she was eleven years old, it became impossible to keep her any longer at this poor little school. At Handbury, a mile nearer to London, there was a High School, and with some searchings of heart her parents decided to send her there. Many of the inhabitants of Greenleys, better off than they were, sent their girls to this school, and it was not possible now to keep her from making her own friends. But she made none whom her parents could well object to. She learnt quickly, and made special progress in music and dancing. She was always well-dressed, she was very pretty, and had quiet, rather shy manners. No one would have taken her for the daughter of a poor clerk; and her grandmother and aunts, on the rare occasions on which they saw her, repeated their protestations at the wickedness of keeping so fair a flower out of her rightful inheritance of admiration. It would be a sin, they said, not to let her go on the stage, when she was old enough. She must take all hearts, and bring a glory to the family name, which, in spite of strenuous efforts, it had never yet attained to.

Her father grew accustomed to these speeches, although he never heard them without an inward shudder. The girl, in spite of her successes, and the friends she now had among the families of her school-fellows who were in a better position than she was, remained soft and loving towards him. She went to church with him and her mother twice every Sunday, and in summer time for walks in the now fast-disappearing fields. She was his daughter still, and the constant pride of his heart. For fifteen years he had led a life as completely happy as falls to the lot of any man, and she, as a baby, a little child, and a growing girl, had brought the greater part of it, although his gentle wife, his work, his freedom from the cares that were so frequent all around him, and his simple, unclouded faith, had all played their part.

His life passed in such absolute sameness that, beyond their yearly fortnight at the seaside, the holidays at home at Christmas and Easter, and the changes of the seasons, there had been nothing to mark it except the growth of the child, and the episodes of her schooldays.

One evening he came home in deep dejection, which he could not keep from his wife and daughter; but it was some time before he could bring himself to tell them what had happened. When he did tell them they were nearly as troubled as he was.

He had made a blot on the fair page of the great ledger, which was full of his exquisitely neat even writing, and was one of a long line of such books, in none of which had such a thing happened before. It was his great pride that never yet had he had to make an erasure. He did not suppose that there was a book-keeper in the city of London who could say the same, or a firm whose books might all so well be shown as a model to aspiring youth.

Of course the blot could be, and had been, taken out, so that none but a very careful observer could tell that it had ever been there. But that did not console him. He had half a mind to buy a new ledger and copy out all the entries he had made through many months; but even that would not do away with the memory of his carelessness. He had made the blot, and nothing could do away with it. It was like what the Bishop had said, when he preached in Greenleys Church. A sin would be forgiven you if you repented of it, but its effects remained. Nothing could ever be as it was before the sin was committed.

So he made a parable of his error, and resigned himself by degrees to the loss of the fine perfection of his record.

When his daughter was fifteen she was confirmed. This was the culminating point of his pride in her. She was so good and so beautiful that as she went up to the altar rails and knelt there all in maiden white, he thought that God, to whom he had dedicated her at her birth, must be pleased at the gift of so pure a soul; and, when the hands of the Bishop were laid on the fair, comely head, that He was finally accepting his offering, and would pour gifts above the ordinary on His child.

IV

DURING all the years of his marriage none but two had passed without his putting by some money. There had been no illness to drain his little store, and only when they had moved out from London, and in the year following, when his child had been born, had he spent the whole of his income. A provision for his old age, when he should be past work, was now well on the road to accomplishment, and he could even face

with some equanimity the idea of death coming to himself before he should have finished his work, for he would not leave his wife and child quite unprovided for.

But he had not saved enough, and could not save enough, to make it right that his daughter should live at home like the daughters of more fortunate men, without doing something to earn a living for herself. As long as he was there, and able to provide for them, all would be well; but if he died, and they were left to their own resources, she would have to work, and it might then be more difficult to place her as she ought to be placed.

When she was sixteen, after careful consideration and inquiry, they apprenticed her to a milliner at Hand-bury. They had rejected every occupation in which she would have to work in public, or in semi-public, and they were averse to her taking the daily journey to and from London. Where she was, she was in responsible care, and spent little time in going to and from her work. She left home at the same time as her father, and returned before him, so that he did not miss her at any time from his home.

She showed quick aptitude for her work and was contented with it. Life flowed on smoothly, as before, and she never expressed a wish for any recreation or excitement outside her quiet home. Sometimes she went to the houses of one or other of her old school-fellows, but for the most part had only the companionship of her father and mother.

When she had been at work for rather more than a year, her mother began to complain of pain in her breast. It came out that she had borne it for a long time, but it was getting worse; she could no longer do the work of the house, and she thought she ought to see a doctor.

The dreadful verdict was 'cancer'—an advanced case. She died about the time that her daughter had finished her apprenticeship. She had been most tenderly nursed at home, and had undergone two operations to prolong her life by a few months. This had brought great expense, and had reduced the savings of years by half.

Father and daughter lived on in the little home, now greatly saddened. She went on with her work in the same shop, at a small salary. They had a servant, but she did not sleep in the house, and they were alone together in the evenings, and for most of Sundays.

Not many months after his wife's death, he began to be greatly troubled with rheumatism, which chiefly affected his wrists. This meant more doctors, and treatment which also cost money, but did nothing to improve his condition. A year later he wrote with difficulty, and was beyond the capacity to lift the heavy ledgers with which he had to deal during his daily work. The firm which had employed him parted with him with regret, and gave him a gratuity of a hundred pounds.

He got a post as bookkeeper in one of the big stores that had taken the place of the old-fashioned shops in Greenleys, but was unable to keep it long, as he could now scarcely hold a pen in his crippled fingers.

They moved from the little villa where they had been so happy into three tiny rooms in an old cottage. It was in a quiet back lane near the Park, which had once been the garden and paddocks of a large house, and they counted themselves fortunate in finding so pleasant a refuge, still in the place to which they clung. But their money dwindled. There was not enough left to keep them for more than a year or two.

His daughter, who was now nineteen, told him, lovingly, but with tears, that she had had an offer,

through one of her aunts, to dance and sing in the chorus of a London theatre, and had accepted it. She could not expect to earn enough in her present situation, to keep them both, for years to come.

He accepted her decision uncomplainingly, but with anguish at his heart. Greenleys was not then in such communication with London as to permit of her coming home every night after the play was ended, and she lodged with one of her aunts. But she spent every Sunday and most of Monday with him, and they went to church together, and walked in the Park, and sometimes went farther afield. These were days of joy to him; the rest of the week he spent mostly in patient idleness, thinking of the happiness of his past life, reading in his Bible—he did not care for other books—and keeping an eye on the children of the overworked women who were his neighbours, and treated him with great respect. He could do little for himself, but was well in health, although now much crippled.

He never went to see his daughter on the stage, and she did not ask him to go, nor ever talked about her experiences of the theatre. She was the same sweet, quiet, loving child to him that she had always been, and her refinement of speech and manner, which had always been far above her station, seemed to have increased, if anything.

By-and-by, seeing her always as he would have her, he grew reconciled to her occupation, and, but that he thought of her continually while she was away from him, would almost have forgotten it. He never saw her more than simply dressed, and only when his sister-in-law came to see him, and told him that she had been promoted from the ranks, and was already beginning to 'catch on,' did he accept without remonstrance the extra delicacies and comforts that she loved to bring him.

'You couldn't have brought her up better for the purpose,' said the ex-dancer. 'It's because she's so innocent and quiet, and pretty and clever with it all, that she's different from the rest. If her voice was a bit stronger she'd be leading lady, and earning her hundred pounds a week, or more, to-morrow.'

Then it was for this that he had cherished and sheltered her childhood and youth! God's ways with man were difficult to understand; but he gained some comfort from the idea that her influence would purify the lives of those about her.

V

THEY often talked together of her mother, not sadly now, but as if she were near them, and knew what they were doing. But one Sunday, when he mentioned her name, the girl cried, and said she missed her more than ever.

He was troubled all the week by the memory of her tears, which were unlike her, but the next Sunday she was happy again, and even gay; her sadness did not return, and she seemed to become more tender and loving towards him as the months rolled by, and he became more and more helpless.

The old Rector whose preaching he and his wife had so much admired was long since in his grave, and more than one had succeeded him. The church had completely changed, both in appearance and method, and was now nearer in ritual to what he remembered of St Barnabas than to what it had formerly been.

Once more he made a practice of attending the earliest services. He could just manage to kneel at the altar-rails, and receive the consecrated bread in his distorted hands: the chalice was held to his lips.

He gained great consolation from these services, and fed on them in spirit until the time when his daughter should come to him later in the morning.

The Rector visited him regularly. He was an austere, unsmiling man, and asked him many questions.

One afternoon he came to him as he was sitting in the tiny garden of the cottage, where there was a lilac-tree that reminded him of the one in his old garden. He asked him about his daughter, but cut short his answers by telling him that it had come to his ears that she had left the theatre some time before, and was living as the mistress of a rich man well known in society, who was already married. He told him that it was his duty to reclaim her. Better a life of the direst poverty than a life of sin.

When the Rector had gone, he sat on under the blossoming lilac with no power of thought left him, but only a feeling of sad desolation. It did not occur to him to doubt the truth of the statement, but his love for his daughter was stronger than before.

When she came to him the next Sunday, she saw at once that he knew. She threw herself on his breast, and wept, and asked him to forgive her for the sorrow she had caused him.

But she would not promise to leave the man she loved. He had a wife with whom he had lived wretchedly. He was good to her, and had taken her from the stage, which she now told her father she had always hated. She could not bear to go back to it. They were happy together, and she loved him dearly. She had not given in to him until after he had been kind to her for a long time.

He was cut to the heart. When she had left him, and he thought of the white purity of her childhood, and the reverence he had paid to it as the gift of God, to whom he had dedicated her from her birth, the

slow tears fell one by one down his cheeks. He felt himself forsaken, his offering rejected. The days when he had so loved her as a little child seemed to belong to another world, and the rare brightness of the one in which he was now living to have gone out of it altogether.

She continued to come to him every Sunday. She was very tender and loving with him. She talked to him of her lover, and the quiet life she led, both when she was alone and when he was with her; and he listened, but said nothing.

But he refused any longer to take gifts from her, or to allow her to share in the rent of the three little rooms they had occupied together. She pleaded with him, but to no purpose. He could not prevent her keeping on her bedroom, and what had been their joint sitting-room, and made no attempt to do so. When she was there—and she came sometimes in the week now, as well as on Sundays—he occupied it with her; but when he was alone he kept to his bedroom, and took his meals with the woman of the house. When his money should be used up, he would be able to live there no longer. But he did not look forward.

The Rector, who had been away for a holiday, came and asked him what he had done. When he heard that he had done nothing, and that his daughter still visited him, he rebuked him sternly for his weakness, and ended by saying that if he did not repudiate her he was sharing in her sin, and could no longer be received at the altar.

He never told her this, and she did not know that he hungered for the spiritual food denied him, nor that the tender and serene affection he showed her hid a dark emptiness of soul that only became deeper as the days went by.

He took to his bed, and never rose from it again. He

was crushed by the weight of his punishment, but suffered in patience, because he was sure that he was a sinner above other men, perhaps even in this earthly affection to which he still clung. But he would not deny her. She was his dearly loved daughter; if she perished, he would perish with her.

He lay where he could see the lilac in the garden. The only times of freedom from distress that he knew were when, in long hours of silence, he could almost think that he was once more back in the years when she had been his little child. He thought often of his dead wife, and his thoughts came to centre round the years of their early married life, and the after-years when she had been in pain faded from his memory. When he became weaker he regained something like contentment at times, but the sorrow of his later life lurked always in the background, and he still felt that he was forsaken of God.

But when his daughter was with him he forgot his sorrow.

He was quite alone when he died. His wandering thoughts had gone back to the day on which, in the midst of his constant happiness, he had made the blot in his ledger; and he muttered to himself regrets at that staining of his page.

But, after a long silence, his face changed, and took on an expression of wonderment. He half-raised himself on his pillows, and looked out into and beyond the little room in which he was lying, as if he saw something glorious and comforting beyond belief.

He stretched out his disfigured hands towards it. 'The book! The book!' he whispered. 'Clean and white! The blot wiped out!'

Then, with a smile, he laid himself meekly down to rest.

THE SQUIRE AND THE WAR

I

'WELL,' said the Squire, 'if this is French food, give me English.'

He and his daughter, Nancy, sat at their lunch in a hotel at Havre. In all the seventy-four years of his life, during most of which he had had the money and the leisure to go anywhere he pleased, this was the first time he had been out of England. And it would certainly be the last time.

Nancy smiled at him. He had eaten a hearty lunch, in spite of his frequent exclamations. 'They will give us good coffee, at any rate,' she said. 'Shall we have it outside?'

'Anything to get out of this dog's hole,' said the Squire, rising from the table.

They went slowly through the room, for the Squire had what he called a touch of rheumatism, which meant walking rather painfully with a stick. Many eyes were turned upon them, for there was that about both of them which aroused interest and sympathy—and perhaps some admiration.

Nobody who knew anything of English types could have mistaken Edward Clinton for anything but a country gentleman, of importance in his own corner of the world, if of none in particular outside it. Just that sense of dignity and assuredness that radiated from him could only have come from landed possessions. He might have had importance besides, in larger affairs—as a matter of fact he had none—but it would not

have given him that air. He was a tall, largely-built man, with good features and a red health-tinted skin, bushy white eyebrows and a thick, square-cut beard. There were no signs of mourning in his dress, although he had already lost two sons in the war, and with the elder of them had gone out much of the light that had illumined his latter days.

Nancy Spence was of the fair-haired, blue-eyed, English type, tall and straight, with delicate colouring, and a look of race in form and feature. She might have had all that, and still been without beauty. But she had beauty too; the looks that followed her told that. She was quietly, though very becomingly, dressed, mostly in black. Her husband's brother had been killed as well as two of her own. Her husband had been wounded in the early days of the war, and taken prisoner. After eighteen months in Germany he had been released, and interned in Switzerland. She and her father were on their way to him there.

They sat down at a little table immediately outside the hotel, drank their coffee, and watched the unfamiliar show of the *plage*. The Squire was interested, in spite of himself. Havre was full of English soldiers. A purely French crowd might have been too much for him, though his old-fashioned British prejudice against the French had undergone some modifications since they and the English had fought shoulder to shoulder.

Nancy talked brightly to him, pleased to see him free for a moment from his brooding thoughts, which had accompanied him so far on their journey, though her own heart was all the time singing within her with happiness and expectation.

He had taken the war very hard, from the beginning. He had turned his great house of Kencote over to the Red Cross for a private hospital, and gone with his wife to live at the Dower House hard by, where he had

occupied himself with all sorts of war-work set in hand by the county in which, by reason of his wide possessions and ancient name, he was a leading figure. But he had no head for affairs larger than those of estate management, and even in those he had come of late years to depend much upon his eldest son, who had retired from the army some years before, to live on the estate that would one day be his own. Dick had rejoined at the beginning of the war, and gone out almost immediately. How his father had missed his cool head and capable way in all the duties he had taken on his shoulders! Things went wrong continually. The Squire fussed and fumed, and longed for Dick a dozen times a day. He was beginning to make himself a burden to those who worked with him, and one committee, of which he was chairman, asked him to resign. He felt the slight all the more for an uneasy suspicion that the request was justified; but he had no word of complaint to make about the hurt to his own dignity, and did not retire from the committee itself, as he would certainly have done in like circumstances before the war.

Then Dick had been killed. What that meant to him nobody knew but his quiet, gentle wife, in that secret community of sorrow from which the world was shut out. Outside, he only seemed rather more fussy and irritable than before.

John Spence, Nancy's husband, who had rejoined his old regiment of Guards with Dick, had been wounded and taken prisoner in the same battle. And young Lord Inverell, the husband of Nancy's twin-sister, Joan, had also been seriously wounded. That was in the first months of the war. The Clinton family had already paid a heavy toll.

There were others of them to think about, and their names to watch for, as the dread lists came out day

after day—sons, and another son-in-law, besides innumerable relations and connections. But the chief blows had already been struck. Sorrow came not so near Kencote again until Humphrey, the second son, who had come over with the Australian forces, was killed in the landing at Gallipoli. He had been abroad for some years, and his death was not the sharp sorrow that Dick's had been. But he was the heir, after Dick. The foundations of the house were being nibbled away. When would this awful slaughter end, and would there be any of the next generation left when it was all over? The Squire could not take large views. The whole burden of it seemed to be on his own shoulders. What he should do himself seemed of the utmost importance; he worried and wore himself over the failure of others to come up to his standards.

John Spence's internment was a godsend. Nancy would have rushed off to him by herself, the moment the road was clear for her, and perhaps preferred to do so; but the Squire was persuaded that he was the only man available to take her. He hummed and ha'd, and doubted whether he could be spared, while his womenfolk dealt subtly with his hesitations, and his co-workers assured him that they could get on without him.

At last he decided to go, to everybody's great relief. The change would do him good; his mind would be taken off. Those who felt for him in his troubles breathed again; there would be a little respite for them, as well as for him.

II

INVERELL was attached to the British Embassy in Paris. His right ankle had been smashed to pulp, and

his foot had had to be amputated. The mending had taken a year, and then he had wanted to go back, but had been dissuaded. He and Joan had installed themselves in a flat in Paris, with their two babies. The Squire and Nancy were going to them for the night, and would leave for Switzerland the next night.

They arrived at last, two hours late. Joan and Inverell were at the station to meet them. The young man hobbled, with a stick. Otherwise he looked the picture of youthful health and vigour, and his and Joan's high spirits rather jarred on the Squire when the meeting took place, though Nancy was thrilled through and through with happiness. She was a stage nearer to her beloved man, and she and Joan had hardly been separated up to the time of her own marriage. She had had to conceal most of her joy during the last day or two, for unadulterated pleasure would have seemed almost indecent to the Squire. But she knew that she could give it rein with Joan, in that long talk they would have together presently. Joan would understand everything. She had been through her time of sorrow, though it had not been so long drawn out as Nancy's, and she had got her man back.

'Haven't you brought a maid, darling?'

The Squire, dealing most incompetently with hand luggage, heard the question. 'We don't want to drag servants about in war time,' he said. 'We've learnt to do things for ourselves.'

He seemed relieved, however, to resign his cares to the servant in attendance on Inverell, though he had his little grumble about that. 'Didn't know you'd bring a footman,' he said. 'We've got rid of all ours.'

'Passed out of the Army,' said Inverell. 'He's done his bit. He'll bring everything along in a taxi. Come along, Mr Clinton, we can get off.'

They rolled smoothly along in Inverell's big car.

The streets were darkened, and nearly empty, though it was not so late but that they would have been full of life and light in normal times. The Squire approved. He said it was disgraceful the way the people behaved sometimes in London. One would have thought that they had never heard of the war.

They crossed the Place de la Concorde and the river. The sky was lit by innumerable shining stars. The city was only half asleep in the summer night, and more beautiful by far than if it had been keeping its gay revel. They stopped for a moment on the bridge to look down the river. The reflections of the few lights that marked the lines on the Quais and the bridges trembled in the flowing water. The silhouettes of the trees in the Tuileries gardens, the Louvre, Notre-Dame in the distance, the Institute, and other buildings on the right bank, were dark against the spangled velvet sky. The soft melancholy of the night had its way with the dreaming city, unchallenged by the glare of lights. Paris had never been seen in that veil of beauty before the war, nor would be after; but the Squire did not know that.

'Paris is a lovely place to live in,' said Joan; 'far more beautiful than London.'

The Squire had no particular opinion of London, and what opinion he had was not concerned with its beauty. But he did not like to hear it compared unfavourably with Paris. 'You'll be glad enough to get out of it, I expect,' he said.

'Oh, I don't know,' said Inverell. 'We're liking ourselves here, aren't we, Joan? If you have to stick and work somewhere, it might just as well be in Paris as anywhere.'

'Oh, yes; nothing matters as long as the war lasts,' said the Squire.

He had a vision of Inverell's great castle in Scotland,

with the miles of country that went with it, and his other fine place in an English county, both of them lacking the occupation which gave them their life and meaning in his view. The war had played havoc with all the amenities of country life, which were to him the only amenities worth having. No, it wouldn't matter where one lived as long as the war lasted, if there was work to do.

The Inverells occupied a sumptuous flat near the Invalides. The Squire opened his eyes when he saw its furnishings. He was the least observant of men in such matters, but its richness and beauty imposed themselves. And surely——!

'Yes, I had a few pictures and things sent over,' said Inverell, meeting his look of inquiry. 'Thought we might as well have the benefit of some of them, as we're likely to be here for some time.'

The Squire turned away from the exquisite Correggio which was the glory of Inverell's collection, and had impressed itself even upon his memory. 'I hope you'll get it back to England safely,' was all he said.

He went soon to his room. He took no further notice of the beautiful things with which it, as well as the rest of the flat, was filled, but undressed slowly, and then knelt by his bedside, a sad, tired, almost broken old man, but one who still had his work to do, and must find strength to do it.

Joan took Nancy to her room, after a visit to the sleeping babies, and they talked long together.

After a while the talk came round to their father. 'He looks awfully sad and old, poor darling!' said Joan.

'He has never got over Dick's death,' said Nancy, 'and I don't suppose he ever will.'

'Oh, poor Dick! It does seem as if something had gone from Kencote that alters everything. And he

was such a dear. Very much like father, he was getting, but with more hold over himself. Do you remember how sweet he was to us when we were little?’

‘Oh, yes. We weren’t of much account, because we were girls; but all the boys were proud of us, all the same, especially Dick. I’d give anything to hear him say: “Well, Twankies, how are things going with you?” when he came home.’

‘Oh, don’t, Nancy! When I heard he was killed all sorts of little things kept on coming back to me, and running through my head. I remember once when we were about fifteen, and heard that he had come home, and we went and knocked at his door as he was finishing dressing for dinner; and we went in and he said just what you said just now—as if he didn’t care much; and he was tying his tie and didn’t turn round; but I saw his dear face in the glass, and it was quite pleased.’

Nancy wiped the tears from her eyes. ‘That’s the sort of thing to remember—to keep him alive,’ she said. ‘I miss him still. There’s a blank, whenever I think of Kencote.’

‘We *were* happy there, Nancy, weren’t we? We had to behave ourselves, of course; but that didn’t do us any harm.’

‘I sometimes think it’s easier being made to behave than to make yourself. My darling old John thinks that everything I do is right, so I have to be extra careful. Bless him! I can hardly believe I’m going to see him again so soon. Yes, Dick was growing very much like father. If he had had a family he would have ruled them with a rod of iron—and all for their good.’

‘He didn’t rule Virginia with a rod of iron. She adored him. I know she’s heartbroken, though she pretends to be so brave. I can tell it from her letters.’

'I don't believe she will ever get over it. She'll just live her life on the outside, but it will be quite empty. Dick was everything to her, and now he's dead there'll be nothing left. He did rule her, you know; but she liked it. That's where the blank is. But she's most awfully sweet—sweet and gentle—to mother and everybody. She has had more to do with keeping father quiet than anybody.'

'I suppose he——'

'Oh, well; you remember what he used to be when anything went wrong. He is wonderfully changed about little things. That's what makes it so pathetic. You can imagine what it all means to him—Dick and Humphrey both dead, and Walter the heir now. He would have thought and talked about nothing else—before.'

'I think he would rather that Walter should succeed than poor Humphrey. But doesn't he talk about it at all?'

'No. It's all the war; nothing else. Oh, he's changed, and it isn't only Dick's death that has changed him. We all wish he wouldn't take it so seriously, though Heaven knows it's serious enough. Still, he can't *do* anything. That is what one comes to feel when one is going through it oneself. At first when John was taken, after I knew he was alive, but not how badly he might be wounded, I felt as if I *must* go and break through and get at him somehow. I couldn't bear just to go on living comfortably at home, doing nothing. It took me a long time to bring myself just to wait.'

'Oh, I know, darling. It was worse for you than for me. I got my Ronald back almost at once, and could do something for him, though it was dreadful to think of him maimed for the rest of his life. Well, you *have* waited, and the bad time is over, as mine is.

And now you're going to him. Nancy, darling, it must be heavenly for you.'

They both cried a little—tears of happiness and of sympathy.

'We are both very fortunate,' Nancy said. 'Think what it must mean for Virginia, and all the others whose husbands have been killed. It's all over for them, and they have nothing left to hope for.'

'Poor Virginia! I don't think I *could* have gone on if it had happened to me like that—with no children.'

'I had to face that when I thought that John might have been killed, or died of his wounds. I could *just* have gone on, with the children; and afterwards there might have been *something*. But Virginia——! . And yet she's sweet and kind and smiling. You'd hardly know—unless you did know.'

'And darling mother? One never knows how much she feels.'

'It has made her seem older. Otherwise there isn't much difference in her. She has been wonderful. She did love Dick, though she never made a fuss of him.'

'Yes, and he had been so much more thoughtful of her of late years, and attentive. Virginia had a wonderful effect upon him.'

'I think Dick was a very fine man. All the people at Kencote loved him, though some of them were a little afraid of him. He was rigid, but he was very kind. He would have been just in his place as Squire of Kencote—I should think one of the best that there has ever been, in over five hundred years.'

'It—it sort of puzzles you, to think of all that wiped out, just as if he were nobody much—I mean that it didn't count in what he did. He was just a good soldier—nothing more, though he *meant* so much more.'

'I suppose that's what father feels in his heart of hearts. It's the way he looks at things.'

'Yes. It makes it worse for him, because it isn't really like a wife losing her husband, or a mother her son.'

'He did love Dick.'

'But not in the same way. I suppose he loved Humphrey too, but his being killed wouldn't have made all that difference, if Dick hadn't been. It's what Dick stood for—Kencote, and the line, and all that—something that was there before he was born, and will go on after he is dead.'

'I shouldn't have thought much about that if Ronald had been killed—not even if there hadn't been my precious little son to succeed him.'

'No, that's just it. Women don't. It's all personal with us. But men can put an idea first, and leave themselves out of it.'

'Women too, Nancy. It's splendid how the women are prepared to give up those they love for France, here.'

'Yes, in a great cause; not in a little one like the continuance of a family. Father has been rather fine about that, too. Kencote has been his gospel up to now, but fighting for England comes before all that. He has never said a word of all I have been saying—about Dick, I mean. It's only that I know he must feel it in that way. He won't wear a sign of mourning, or let mother.'

'It's the real *noblesse oblige*. It always has been that with families like ours. I suppose it's the condition. We have more than other people, but we mustn't count it when the danger comes. It's ourselves we must give.'

'We have, haven't we? You and I couldn't have wanted to hold our men back. They went, and they

have both suffered, and we have suffered, and now it's over, for us. We can't do any more. But poor father can't see it in that light. He has lost enormously, but he must still go on tearing himself to pieces over it. Oh, I do hope the poor old darling will learn to take things easier, somehow, when we get to Switzerland. He will be among the men who have gone through the realities. I don't know how it will affect him, but I can't help hoping it will make some difference. Joan, darling, I must go to bed. I'm not sleepy, and I should like to talk all night. But we shall be in the train to-morrow night, and I must be as fresh as I can when I meet my darling old John.'

III

THERE was a ceremony to be witnessed at the Invalides the next morning, for which Inverell had obtained places of vantage for his party. Honours and decorations were bestowed by the President of the Republic. The band of the Garde Republicaine played in the great square surrounded by the marshalled crowd under the bright June sky. One by one the men in horizon blue, and some in khaki—for English soldiers were honoured as well as French—came forward, were saluted and decorated, and then retired. It was soon over.

The Squire was struck by the simplicity of the proceedings, and forbore to remark upon the fraternal kiss with which each recipient was greeted. In pre-war days he would probably had attributed this custom to a lack of manly vigour on the part of the whole French nation, and would certainly have commented upon the President's tall hat, and the comparative absence of military display, to which as a one-time officer of the

Household Troops he had been accustomed in similar ceremonies in England. Now he saw more deeply. 'Every man in the nation who is fit for it is a fighting soldier,' he said. 'And we've seen how they can fight. Why can't we call up all our men, as they do, and have done with it?'

Conscription was still being debated by Englishmen. 'I don't know that the fellows who haven't already gone of their own accord will be worth much when you get 'em,' said Inverell.

'Some won't,' said the Squire; 'and when they find it out they can put them to other jobs. Everybody has got to do something, or we shall go under.'

The Investiture was early in the morning, and they motored out to Versailles afterwards—Joan and Nancy and the Squire. Joan thought that the drive through the Bois and along the river would please him, as it pleased Nancy. But though he had to some extent overcome his prejudice against motoring as a means of progression, which had persisted for years after others like himself had accepted it as a convenience, he was not to be pleased by a mere outing. Petrol restrictions had not yet come into force, but he was ahead of his time—which he had never been before in his life—in scenting waste of money and material in everything that was not devoted to the great object of pushing on with the war.

Joan and Nancy exerted themselves to please him, and he made his effort to respond. In the old days he would have expressed himself with the utmost freedom over anything that did not suit him. Even after their marriages he had kept his licence of criticism. But that loud confident domination had disappeared; he was bewildered and troubled, with a growing sense of all the world awry, and of his own impotence to set it right.

He was a damp upon his daughter's enjoyment, but they felt the change in him to be so significant that they could only show themselves soft and tender with him.

On either side of the broad road leading into Versailles there were lines of gray-painted army motor vehicles, standing side by side, and extending for an unbroken mile at least. It was just one example of the incredible mass of material needed to feed the machine of war, and the Squire was struck by it. 'I suppose you'd see something like this everywhere you went in France,' he said. 'Ah, they may be light-headed and frivolous and all that, but they've had those murderous brutes over-running their country, and they'll work and fight till they get rid of them. This brings it home to you how near they still are.'

'And they have been so much nearer,' said Joan. 'I've met people who heard the guns from Paris.'

'Do us good to have heard the guns from London,' he said. 'Nobody would have thought, before the war, that the French would take things more seriously than the English. But as far as I can judge, there's more tomfoolery going on now in London than there is in Paris.'

Perhaps the sight of so many motor vehicles used for war purposes had reconciled him to sitting in one that was being used for pleasure; or his sudden view of Paris as threatened and sobered had cleared the air for him. He was less moody and disturbed on the drive back, and talked affectionately to Joan, of her husband and children.

'Those innocent little souls!' he said. 'God grant that it won't make a mark on *their* lives. They're young enough to be able to forget all the horrors, when we get back to our proper life.'

'Yes, they have been sheltered,' Joan said. 'But

it's dreadful to think of the little children who have known all the misery of it.'

'The women and children,' he said. 'It's worse for them. Men *like* fighting—those that are worth being called men; there's no getting over that. But the women and the little children! Ah! when you can't do anything to protect them——!'

He relapsed into his frowning, sombre mood. Joan felt an immense lift of tenderness and pity towards him—and of understanding. She had known him all through her girlhood dominant over his womenkind, expecting them to submit themselves unquestioningly to his dispositions, and to content themselves within the limited horizons which he thought good for them. He had fussed and fumed and asserted outraged authority whenever anything had happened that had injured his sense of what was owing to himself. He had seen himself as the little God of his home, and had had no doubt, in subjecting those dependent on him to his will, that it was right and the best thing for them that they should live in that subjection. But this consciousness of right had depended upon his power to afford them the protection that was due to them from him, and he had learnt by the bitter experience of the war—the losses suffered by those dear to him, and still more the shame and agony of thousands who had lain at the mercy of the swinish foe—that the love of the strongest and bravest of men was impotent to shield the weak.

But a man who, in the Squire's view, was worthy of the name of man, could at least fight to lift the menace of such horrors. Yes, if he was of an age to express his manhood in that way. For himself, his 'fighting days were over.' He must leave that to others, and take his own place with the women and children for whom strong men went out to do battle.

Joan had often heard him use the easy phrase in the early days, when the adventure of going out to fight was uppermost, and the shame and misery of war had not yet bitten into the spirit. He used it no longer, but she saw in a flash of insight that it was because the bitter actualities had seized him, not because he felt less poignantly the impotence of his own age. It did not matter now that one old man could not do the work of a young one. What did matter was that the cloud of horror was not yet lifted, and the weak and helpless lay under it.

'I think we English women are more fortunate than others, father dear,' Joan said, gently. 'We give our men to fight, and it's dreadful for us if we lose them; but they know that *we* are safe. Those who can't fight any longer are looking after us, and they can think of us in our homes, which they can come back to when it's all over.'

He smiled at her kindly, with an obvious effort to throw off his dark thoughts. 'Keep the home fires burning, eh?' he said. 'That's what the troops sing, and it's a good song for them to sing. Yes, it's for us who can't come out here and take our part to do that. I wish I thought we all saw it enough, as a nation.'

He looked about him after that, praised the Bois, and the Champs Elysées, and allowed himself a prophetic vision of victorious troops marching under the Arc de Triomphe down the long hill. 'It is a fine city,' he said. 'Thank God *they* were kept out of it.'

Inverell met them for lunch at the 'Ambassadeurs.' They lunched outside, in the happy sparkling atmosphere of Paris in June, just as they might have done in normal times. There was the same gay chatter of the rich, apparently careless, well-dressed crowd, the same under-current of concentration over the business of serving the most expensive wines and viands, the

same profusion of supply and demand. Food restrictions had not yet begun to affect life either in France or England, but it seemed a shocking thing to the Squire that eating and drinking to this extravagant extent should occupy the attention of anybody at such a time.

He did his best to keep his strong disapproval to himself, but he was not good at that at any time, and Joan regretted that she had arranged this luncheon at a restaurant, which she had thought would amuse him and Nancy.

He would not have objected to exactly the same meal served in her apartment. He would have eaten and drunk whatever had been set before him, and enjoyed it, in spite of his always strongly expressed preference for English food and English cooking. The wine he might have noticed and commented upon, because he knew about wines, and because you pleased your host by approving of his taste in them. But this ordering of your meal in public, in consultation with your guests, with a *maître d'hôtel* standing at your elbow and booking your orders, not without advice of his own, struck him as very like taking part in a mistress's consultation with her servants—almost an indecency. The restaurant habit was, in fact, entirely unknown to him. In his expansive youth it had been unheard of. The nearest he had ever come to it had been in giving luncheons or dinners at one of his clubs—meals as elaborate as this and as carefully arranged, but arranged beforehand, so that the guests should get the right flavour of hospitality, and accept the good things set before them as they would have accepted them at his own table. Neither Joan nor Nancy divined that half his displeasure, which he could not hide, was at being obliged, under Inverell's hospitable pressure, to express his preference for this or that luxury, with the price of it

staring him in the face on the *ménu*, when indulgence in any sort of luxury was so far from his mood.

'The poor old boy is very difficult to please,' said Inverell to his wife afterwards. 'He seems to have the impression that we're spending our money on riotous living, when we're really saving it hand over fist.'

That was, in fact, the impression that the Squire carried away from his visit to his daughter and son-in-law, though he would have been surprised to learn that he had made it so apparent.

'Poor old darling, I'm so frightfully sorry for him,' Joan said. 'He can't have very much longer to live, and the end of his life must be very sad in any case. If only he could make the best of it for himself!'

'He'd be making the best of it for everybody else,' added Inverell. 'Still, I suppose that sort of spirit is wanted, or we shouldn't be able to carry it through to the end. I admire him for it, you know. Even if he's rather a nuisance to other people, he doesn't spare himself.'

IV

NANCY slept fitfully during the night in the train, but except for her wish to look her best when she met her husband, she did not want to sleep. She was too happy, hugging her expectations.

Nearly two long years it was since he had said good-bye to her in those first high-hearted days of the war, which had so soon been followed by days of sickening alarm, of anxiety, and then of troubled and seemingly endless monotony. In the censored letters she had received from him he had made light of his wounds, which had been in the arm and shoulder, and, according

to his statements, long since healed. He had ceased for some time to refer to them at all. She had felt very doubtful on this account of his being allowed out of Germany with the others, who had received such damage that they might as well be let go as be kept. When the glad news had come that he had been finally passed for internment in Switzerland the first irradiation of joy had been dimmed by the fear that he must be worse than he had admitted to her.

But she had heard from him since. His arm—fortunately it was his left arm—was quite stiff at the elbow, and his shoulder joint was not of much use to him. He was, in fact, more permanently crippled than many of those who had been let out, though in other respects he was well. He had kept the extent of his disablement from her, but assured her that he had become used to it, and it scarcely worried him at all. He would still be able to put his arm round her waist, if she happened to be on that side of him, although he would always have to use his right hand if he wanted to brush a fly off his nose. He could not lift the other more than a few inches. But what did that or anything else matter, since he was going to see her so soon again? She wasn't to worry about it at all.

Poor dear old John, making light of everything that might distress her for his sake—it was what he had always been to her—strong and cheerful and loving, but dependent on her too, and drawing much of the strength that she rested in from her trust in him. He was a good many years older than she, but she had for him that maternal feeling which is so beautiful a factor in married love. He was a man of large property, who admirably fulfilled his duties as a landowner, with all their responsibilities of leadership. He was the acknowledged and respected head of his house. The men of his regiment had looked up to him. He was

a man of action, courage, and decision, expert in the pursuits which make demand on such qualities, and physically fitted for them. A man among men, but to her a great, simple, loving child, who greatly revered her higher intellectual equipment, and leant upon her to supplement qualities which she loved and admired in him in return.

She had wept tears afresh when she had first learnt of the extent of his disablement. The pain was over for him; he had adapted himself, he had assured her earnestly, to the alteration in his state, which left by far the greater part of his physical powers intact. He was more fortunate than others, with limbs lopped, sight or speech or hearing ruined, bodily organs affected in such a way as to alter the whole course of life for them, and reduce them in the hey-day of their strength and vigour to permanent invalidism. But he was hers, and she felt acutely for his sake the disabilities of which he had made so light. He would be able to hunt, he said; the stiff arm had lost little in muscular power. But hunting had been only a secondary amusement with him, especially since he had grown older and heavier. He was a very fine shot, and his preserves were famous. He had said nothing about shooting, which was significant enough in itself; and if he could scarcely move his arm from the shoulder he would not be able to shoot, or else he must learn to do so with a light single-handed gun.

And she had always loved to hear him strumming on a piano, for which he had small aptitude but a great liking. He loved music, and good music too, with child-like, uncritical enthusiasm. 'I say, old girl isn't this jolly? I haven't got it quite right yet, but if I mug at it a bit more I believe it will sound something like it.' She would find him sitting at the grand piano in the great drawing-room—for he preferred that piano

to any other in the house—laboriously spelling through a page of the *Meistersinger*, or a slow movement from a Beethoven Sonata—a large, tweed-suited, incongruous figure in such surroundings of state, but a much to be loved and cherished one, for the clean simplicity of his nature. He would not be able to play the piano any more, which some wives, considering the nature of his performances, might have been glad of—but not Nancy.

Small things these!—since he was alive where so many were dead, and well, and she was going to him. But it was their part—appreciable enough—of the remorseless payment now being exacted from the blood and brains and sinew of the civilised world. What that payment was in its appalling sum no human brain could grasp; but it could be gauged in some quite inadequate degree from the personal incidence of it.

There was Ronald Inverell, a cripple for life—making the cheerful best of it, adapting himself with youthful zest and spirit to the big things that were left him to do and to enjoy, but, when all was said and done, a cripple for life. There was the only son of their old Rector, at home in Yorkshire, a young painter of extraordinary gifts, whose career his friends had been watching with the keenest interest—blind. There was one of their tenant farmers, back from the war, treading his fields again, going to market, making money, strong and active and still young, but with his mouth twisted and deformed, so that he could speak with difficulty and must eat alone. His child, who had adored him, had cried out in terror of his greeting, when he had come home—cured.

These were the incidents of the widespread agony that had come home to Nancy personally—with the perhaps merciful deaths which had brought sorrow to her and to those dear to her. They opened for her

windows to a world groaning in pain and trouble, a world darkened and stricken. It frightened her when she thought of it, and made her ask herself if she had the right to give herself up to the unrestrained joy of what was coming back to her, since to thousands there could be no such relief of their pain. She knew that her father, with an imagination never hitherto greatly stirred by events that touched him not personally, was bowed down by the weight of it; that the continual sight of the men who were being nursed back to whatever of health or vigour was left to them, in the house in which he had lived all the years of his richly endowed life, was weighing on his brain, like a long evil dream from which he could not shake himself awake; that he did grasp, more than most, the limitless ruin of which the examples that came under his own eyes were so small and yet so terrible a part. It was with him night and day, and blinded his eyes to what was left of the life that he had always known.

And yet there was so much of that life still left, in spite of the hugeness of the catastrophe, which had drawn in more of the rank and file of humanity than had ever before been entangled in the net of war. It could not be wrong for her, who had borne her share of the suffering, to rejoice in the restoration that had been made to her. It would not make her less tender towards those whose loss and suffering had been, or would be, greater than hers. She and her husband had met the claims that had been made upon them. So had her father. If only he could be content with what he had done, and what he still might do as part of the great machine, and throw off from his already heavily-bowed shoulders burdens which no anxious effort of his could lighten!

Perhaps his troubled mind would be eased when he had been for a time out of his groove, and among

those whose heavy payment had already been made—those who must now be rejoicing in their new-found liberty, and would want to forget the horrors. For herself and her dear man she knew that some degree of forgetfulness must be encouraged. The time for solace and happiness had come for them, as it had come months ago for Joan and Ronald, if not yet for countless others. She was quietly happy when she fell asleep as the sun was rising over the eastern woods and fields of France.

She had seemed scarcely to have fallen asleep when they were aroused for passport examination at the frontier station. Thanks to the diplomatic recommendations obtained for them by Inverell, they were the first to be served. It would have been easy enough for the Squire to have gained some such facilities for their journey from London to Paris, but he had refused to bestir himself. It was quite right to discourage travelling among those whose journeys had nothing to do with the carrying on of the war. Why should an old man and a young woman whose object was a personal one have things made easier for them than others? This new-found modesty showed a surprising change in him. Before the war he would have considered any such priority that could have been arranged for him only his due. He was of the ruling classes, which naturally take precedence of the undistinguished crowd. But long waits at the British and French ports, in company with the undistinguished crowd, while many not so self-obliterating as himself, and certainly not more deserving of consideration, had preceded him, had softened his objection to taking personal advantage. Inverell had obtained ambassadorial courtesies for him as a matter of course, and he had not refused them.

So he and Nancy were not obliged to spend an hour

or more wedged upright in a cosmopolitan mass before their turn came, but could take the limited freedom of the station platform until the train was ready to go on again.

Nancy thought that her father was more his old self, as they paced up and down together, in the freshness of the very early summer morning. Perhaps the deference with which they had just now been treated—ushered straight into the booth where the French and Swiss authorities sat to examine into credentials, while the rest of their fellow passengers waited patiently for admission one by one outside—had restored something of his old relief in his own importance. Or perhaps it was this formal and not to be ignored entry into a country spared the stark horrors, though not the disturbances, of European war, that had heightened his spirits. He was certainly more cheerful than he had been in the earlier stages of their journey, and even inclined to be a little interested in his novel surroundings.

As for Nancy herself, the air she breathed, the ground she trod, spoke of freedom and of renewed happiness. Her husband's imprisonment in an enemy country had weighed daily and hourly on her spirits, almost as if she had been in prison herself. Switzerland, the little land that hugged its neutrality, though completely surrounded by great nations at war, was like a refuge, protected by more than its ring of iron. The summer breeze that blew from its mountains was the breath of safety and freedom. A new sense of security mixed itself with the happiness that she had felt ever since she had known that she could go to her husband. The sun that was shining down on them both would not set again until they had come together, with the long parting at an end, and nothing to separate them again.

'With all this fuss made over going from one country

to another,' said the Squire, 'it's a wonder people aren't content to stay in their own—at least when it's a country like England.'

'There was no fuss before the war,' said Nancy. 'John and I went through France and Switzerland when we went to Italy, and didn't know when we went out of one country into another.'

'People used to have passports when I was a young fellow,' said the Squire. 'I used to hear them talking about them, and always asked why they couldn't be content to stay where they were.'

'I don't think they had to have them, did they? It was just for in case they might find themselves in some difficulty. And they wouldn't have been examined like this at the frontiers.'

'Ah, I dare say,' said the Squire, who did not like to show himself ignorant upon any subject, even upon that of foreign travel. 'I suppose there has never been a time within living memory when people have had to keep themselves so much to their own countries. Good thing too, in my opinion. If we had kept the foreigners out of England more, we might not have had all this trouble.'

It was a return to his old habits of mind and of speech. Foreigners were foreigners, whether they were French or Germans or Russians, and England was England, with old-established well-proved ways which foreigners could only contaminate. The point of view was a good deal less enlightened than that to which he had been brought, of certain foreigners impelled by the same love of justice and liberty as the English, fighting as bravely as they against certain other foreigners antagonistic to those ideals. But general enlightenment was less to be desired in the Squire than the clearing up of the trouble that affected him personally. It gave Nancy an odd sense of pleasure to

find his old prejudice peeping out. 'We shall be among English people almost entirely here,' she said. 'And it will all be over some day, and we shall live in peace again in our dear old England.'

'I hope I shall live to see that day,' said the Squire. 'If we all do our duty as the men who we are going to see have done theirs, I'm sure I shall.'

They had another long wait at another station, where luggage was examined by the Customs. The credentials held by our travellers were such as to spare them trouble even over this, and the Squire rather ungratefully remarked that all the Customs regulations seemed to be a pack of nonsense.

Then they travelled on, with frequent stoppages, for an hour or two longer, and the Squire showed interest, as an agriculturist, in what he could see from the windows of their carriage, but forbore to disturb Nancy, who slept peacefully in her corner, with a smile on her lips.

V

THERE were about three hundred interned prisoners of war—officers and men—in the Alpine resort to which our travellers came that afternoon. Some of the big hotels which had stood empty since the outbreak of the war, were occupied by the men, and the officers were scattered over other hotels and pensions. Some of them, in preparation for wives and families from England, had rented chalets or flats. John Spence had taken a chalet, where he and Nancy could live as near an approach to their home life as was possible under the circumstances. The chalet was of a fair size, and was comfortably furnished. It had a glorious view

of snow-capped mountains over a wide, grassy valley, now bright with summer flowers.

The Squire, dressing for dinner, allowed himself to linger at his open window, and felt something of that fresh pleasure in a new and beautiful scene from which his prejudice against departing from the dear familiar had hitherto debarred him. Scenery, considered as scenery, without reference to its adaptability to pastoral or agricultural pursuits, or to some kind of sport, had never meant much to him—not even English scenery, which, not having known any other, he would stoutly have maintained to be the best in the world.

But the scenery of Switzerland engages the simple mind. It has the right mixture of grandeur and prettiness; it is brightly coloured and definitely presented. It is also well advertised, and the example before him made something of the same impression upon the Squire as the first sight of a masterpiece of painting, known hitherto only through engravings or photographs, might make upon a more ductile mind. He recognised it with approval, as something that people who cared for that sort of thing might be rather pleased to have the opportunity of seeing, and felt himself a travelled man as he contrasted it, not altogether to its detriment, with the scenes upon which his eyes had been accustomed to rest during the more than seventy years of his life.

There was, indeed, a heightened meaning just now, in its facile beauty, which he was as capable of reading as another. That wide, flower-decked valley, scattered over with the little chalets that spoke of its peaceful occupation, bounded by mountains beyond which were other stretches of rich grass-lands, given over to those pursuits which he judged to be among the most natural for mankind in its normal state—what must it mean, with the free winds of heaven blowing over it, to the

men who had lived for many months, sick and wounded, in a German prison camp? To the Squire himself, oppressed more than he knew by the monotony that he had imposed upon his own life in England, there was a grateful sense of having come out into a more spacious more hopeful atmosphere. To these men, released from confinement in many cases hard and cruel, in all cases painful, it must be like heaven. It would be enough for the most active, surely, to sit still and watch the cloud shadows pass over the grass and flowers, and the colours of the mountains change, as the setting sun touched them now here, now there; to know that they would wake on the morrow to the same fair scene, and that the memory of their brutal oppressors, and the pains and humiliations they had undergone, would gradually fade from their minds.

John Spence had engaged a couple of Swiss maids, who, with a soldier servant from among the interned, would suffice for their modest establishment. There was a little dinner party that night, of themselves and three of the men who had come out of Germany. They were a lively, talkative party, even the Squire yielding himself to the general atmosphere of emancipation and happiness. Nancy, at the head of the table, facing her husband, who, except for his khaki and his nearly useless arm, looked much the same as he had looked facing her at home, felt a sense of unreality continually stealing over her. The little Swiss room, clean and bright, with its unpainted wooden walls, its window open to the evening breeze, and the sinking sun which dyed the mountains in soft hues of rose and daffodil and misty blue; the meadow flowers on the table; the Swiss maid serving unaccustomed food—it was surely the opening scene of some pleasant holiday, and the guests who were sitting there happy and at ease were the participants in it, with herself and her husband.

There was no shadow over their pleasure apparent from the past, and none at present from the future.

Well, it would be that as long as they cared to make it so, and left out of account what was going on outside this pool of calm in the midst of the whirlpool of war; also that the holiday might be prolonged far beyond the time when this pretty chalet would content them for a home. For her husband, at least, was still in reality a prisoner, though the bounds of his prison had been so gloriously enlarged. 'Stone walls do not a prison make;' but the converse of this is also true: that the fairest scene in which there is only limited freedom may come to wear the aspect of one. She might come and go, but he would have to stay here.

But the time for such thoughts had not yet come. The peace and the freedom were absolute, and made themselves felt. Nancy would have liked to have her dear John to herself on this first evening, but with her father there they could not have been alone in any case, and she knew how intensely her husband was aware of her all the time he was talking to his guests, and behaving much as if they had all been seated round his table at home.

John's disabled arm worried her more than it seemed to worry him, but she was already getting used to it. He was the only one of the four whose damage was apparent as they sat at table. One of them had used a crutch to walk with, the other two were, in appearance, whole and sound. The man on John's right, who had been in the same prison camp as he, cut up his food for him, and the attention was accepted as a matter of course. The man with the unhealed leg was given a hassock on which he could stretch it, and its whereabouts under the table was carefully noted so that those sitting opposite to him should not knock against it. Wounds and the healing of wounds were a

part of their lives, to be talked about with interest, but with absence of emotion. They talked about them now chiefly in the light of what might further be done for them by Swiss doctors. John was to have regular massage of his shoulder, and hoped to gain great benefit from it. He thought he could already raise his arm a fraction of an inch higher, after one rubbing. Others who had come out with them were to have treatment at the hands of the best surgeons in Switzerland, than whom there are none better. They talked of it all naturally and hopefully; but it was no more than an added topic of conversation. They were not like men making the best of a bad job. They had accepted their disablements. If they could be lessened, so much the better; if not, there was plenty left, for all of them. The huge catastrophe of death and ruin that was surging through the world was being met by an opposing wave of life, strong and urgent to heal and to cover up the ruin. These wounded men, released from the greater trouble, were on the crest of it. They did not want to dwell upon what could not be restored. They did not want sympathy, except from those dear to them, still less pity. What they wanted was to feel themselves again in the warm current of everyday life, men like other men, with power to take and to enjoy.

The Squire had been prepared at the beginning of the war to look upon the Germans as honourable foes, who would play the game of war according to its time-honoured rules, and need not be hated because they played it against us. But he had long since come to regard them as dehumanised brutes, vile and cruel and cowardly to a man. He had often clenched his fist in impotent anger over their crimes against humanity, which must perforce go unpunished until the day of reckoning, when vengeance should be exacted to the

uttermost. And especially with regard to their treatment of prisoners he had felt this smouldering rage. He had come to Switzerland expectant of fuel to feed it; and fuel there was in some of the things he heard over his son-in-law's dinner-table.

But German brutality was not what these men wanted to talk about. Brutality towards any of themselves they would not talk about at all, though the Squire learned that one of them had suffered the cruelest indignities. It was not only that they wanted to forget what they had suffered. There emerged from their talk a vision of the undaunted British spirit, triumphant even when the balance was weighed against it by all the power and none of the mercy. To treat of the Boche as a hated oppressor, with whom some day they would get even, was to give him too much value. He emerged as something in the mass brutal and stupid, but also as something contemptible—a being without humour and without real dignity, in spite of his drilled conceit, whose bullying spirit could be reduced in the long run by the finer spirit of self-respecting manhood.

They could afford to laugh at him, and did laugh at him, especially over stories which showed the irrepressible spirit of the rank and file of their fellow prisoners.

It was the lighter side of everything they looked at in those first happy days of freedom. The Squire gained his impressions, but found little echo of his own deep-seated sense of rage. It was there, under the surface, but because they had been subjected to the outrage, to be hidden from the world. They were scrupulously fair, too. Any kindness, any decency of treatment even, was acknowledged. The Boche was human here and there.

The Squire went to bed rather puzzled. It pleased him to think of these English gentlemen having borne

themselves after the manner of their kind, and so little broken by their bitter experience that one could scarcely have divined that they had been through it. But it would not do for all the world to treat the misdeeds of the blackguardly enemy as lightly as they did. He must be made to pay, and to pay to the last farthing.

VI

THE village of Montex, where the released prisoners were interned, was an old-established pleasure resort of the quieter kind. Travellers had come by diligence to its modest hotels long before the days of holiday rush, to enjoy themselves among its pastures and mountain woods. The peasants of the country prospered from their cheese-making and the cutting of their timber. Visitors came for a few months in the summer, and for the rest of the year they lived the pastoral life that had gone on for centuries, and missed them not at all. Then came the discovery of Switzerland as a winter resort, and Montex had its second season for skating, ski-ing, and lugeing. A few hotels were built, an English church, residential chalets, and modest blocks of flats. There were permanent residents, many of whom were English, and the hotels and pensions filled up twice a year, for some weeks in the summer and some weeks in the winter. But the life of the valley went on unchanged, and little affected by the growth of the town.

At the outbreak of the war, just when the summer holiday season was beginning, Montex emptied as if by magic. A few of the foreign residents remained, and one or more of the hotels was opened for a week or two now and then; but for nearly two years the place

had reverted almost to its former state of a purely Swiss pastoral community.

Now all that was altered. Soldiers in khaki were more in evidence in Montex than the peasants in their blue blouses; the hotels and pensions not given over to the soldiers were filling up with the relations of officers from England or with visitors from other parts of Switzerland, attracted here by the revived English atmosphere; the empty chalets and flats were rapidly being let.

Life, indeed, was flowing freely again in Montex, and in much the same holiday currents as in the days of peace. The lawn tennis courts and the gardens round them were crowded, morning, afternoon, and evening. There were tea parties and bridge parties and dances. The younger officers acquired dogs and pony-carts; the demand for saddle horses excited the farmers for miles around. In the early days of interment British officers had no duties among the men, who were under the Swiss Military authorities. They had nothing to do but to amuse themselves, and to get well. Getting well took up a good deal of time and attention from day to day. Otherwise, making holiday was the sole occupation of the majority, and considering the experiences they had gone through, could be looked upon almost as a duty in itself. It was part of the getting well, in mind as in body.

It was many years since the Squire had taken what could definitely be called a holiday. There were those who might have said that his whole life was a holiday, considering that he did what suited him best in surroundings more congenial than any others, and whatever his days contained of work made no great demands upon him. For years past he had seldom slept away from Kencote. Since the marriages of the twins, five and six years before, he had stayed twice with the

Inverells to shoot grouse and once with the Spences to shoot pheasants, and each time, though he had enjoyed himself, he had been glad to get home. He had paid no other visits during those years, and if he had run up to London occasionally it had always been on the pretext of business, and he had been still more glad to get home.

But this holiday was necessary for him. His life for the last two years had been far more full of affairs than it had ever been, and any sort of change and rest would have done him good. He pottered about with John and Nancy, and with the friends and acquaintances he had made. He went to more houses in a week than he had previously visited in ten years. He would sit in the tennis pavilion watching the play and talking in his loud, confident voice—but neither so loud nor so confident as it had been—to any one whom he met there, but mostly to men. He was a figure in the place, older than any one of the English group, and of more social importance than most.

He was greatly interested in the talk he heard, and the men who had come out of prison were interested in his talk. For their news from home had been scarce, and any one who could tell them of what had happened in England while they had been shut up in Germany was a godsend. The Squire told them a good deal, but unfortunately left them with the impression that what had happened in England redounded little to the credit of his country, which was not the general impression that he wished to convey. Allowances, however, were easily made for this. His type was too recognisable for possibility of error as to where he stood. When a cosmopolitan Englishman married to a Belgian wife advanced some opinion that belittled the effort of England, he flared up at once in his country's defence, as he might have been expected to do. The grumblings

were only for home consumption, and Montex, in the occupation of its British guests, was a bit of home.

But after a week of lotus-eating, at the end of which he had regained the health which he would have said he had never lost, the absence of definite occupation began, as the French would say, to tap upon his system. As far as he was concerned, this was not getting on with the war.

John Spence and Nancy were sitting together one evening on the veranda of their chalet watching the moon rise behind the mountains. The Squire was writing letters indoors, and they were out of hearing of him. They were never tired of being alone. Her hand was in his as they talked, and her head often rested against his shoulder.

They had been talking of their children, whom he had not seen for two years. They had already discussed whether it would not be possible to bring the three of them out. But the eldest was only five, and the youngest had been an infant in arms at the outbreak of the war. It would be a big business to bring them all across Europe under present conditions of travelling. The idea of it, for that and other reasons, had reluctantly been given up. Nancy was to stay with him for a couple of months, and then return to England. She was to come back after Christmas, if the war lasted so long. But at that time the opinion was that peace would be in sight before the winter. Much was expected from the British offensive which was about to begin on the Somme.

'I'm sure I don't know what I shall do without you,' John said. 'We'll hope that by the time you go away we shall know something of what's likely to happen. If not, I can stick it until you come out again, though what I shall do with myself, I don't know. Learn French, perhaps.'

'I wish I could stay with you all the time, darling,' said Nancy, 'or have the children out here. We should all be happy enough. But I suppose I can't.'

'Oh, no. We've settled that. I feel sort of hungry for the kiddies; but it's best for them to be at home. And you mustn't stay away from them too long. We'll make the best of our time here together. After all, it's the best time we've had since we've been married. There are heaps of people not so lucky as we are.'

'One has always to be thinking of that—how lucky we are really. This is a lovely place. We can be very happy here. But I'm afraid you won't be so pleased with it, darling, when the summer is over, and you have to stay on all alone.'

'Don't suppose I shall. But we won't spoil it by looking too far ahead. Doesn't pay to do that in these days. Take what you can get and be thankful for it. It's doing the old boy good, I think, being here. He's worlds better already.'

'Poor old Daddy! If you'd seen him before he came here! Has he talked to you about Dick yet?'

'Not a word. And you said I wasn't to mention his name till he did.'

She squeezed his big hand. 'I want you to tell him what you told me,' she said. 'But I'm sure it will be best to wait till he asks you. He knows you were with him when he died, from your letter. He is sure to want to know more. He will give you an opportunity of telling him when he's ready for it. I don't think he is yet, though I believe he has begun to recover himself.'

When Nancy went up to bed, the Squire came out and sat on the veranda, and smoked a cigar. Usually he allowed himself only one after dinner, and went to bed soon after ten o'clock. As he grew older his hours of sleep reduced themselves, but he could always sleep early in the night.

He sat for some time in silence, watching the moon, which had swung clear of the mountains, the quiet valley whose shadows were streaked by its beams, and the lights of the village beneath them. 'It's a peaceful spot, this,' he said. 'Not difficult to forget something of what is going on, shut up here.'

He was not wont to show himself affected by his surroundings in this way. Healing thoughts seemed to be coming to him. Perhaps, under the influence of the calm night he was feeling after some word of his son, ready now to receive it.

John hoped it might be so. 'Best to forget as much as you can, when you've done all you can,' he said quietly. 'There's a lot you want to remember, though.'

'Seems to me that's going to be the trouble in this place,' said the Squire. 'All of you want to get well again. Nobody wants to hurry that. But we're not nearly through with it yet. Won't do for anybody to forget what still has to be done.'

John was disappointed. Had he been clumsy in what he had said, and pushed away a confidence? He was diffident about his own tact, though it was that of a true and simple nature, and would never lead him far wrong.

'Of course, for all of you,' the Squire went on, 'nothing could be better than this—for a time.'

'Getting back to England would be better,' said John.

'Oh, yes. But that can't be, and you're next best off here. But I'm afraid you'll get sick to death of it after a bit, and I very much doubt whether it will be a good thing for the men to be kicking their heels in idleness. Still, that will all work itself out in time. Got to get well first, and no harm in amusing yourself as much as you can in a place like this in the meantime. But all these people who have collected here—

I'm not so sure about them. There are certainly a good many who could do something if they wanted to.'

'A few might. I don't think there are very many. Women chiefly, and men over military age.'

'Well, what's all this pack of women doing here?' The Squire was now fairly launched. 'Seems to me a lot of them are here for the sake of picking up husbands—if not for themselves, for their daughters. Anyhow, they're mostly here to amuse themselves. Makes you open your eyes to see how many people there are still who can't take the thing seriously. It was the same in Paris. I'm precious glad Ronald Inverell is through with his troubles. Of course he's doing *something*. But—oh, well, I wasn't quite satisfied with the way he and Joan are taking things. And it's the same everywhere you go.'

John Spence felt a tired droop of spirit. During the long months of his imprisonment he and the older men who had been with him had had the progress of the war terribly on their minds. Since he had been in Switzerland he seemed to himself almost to have lost interest in it. He was, in fact, convalescing, in spirit as well as in body. He was not yet ready to take up the mental burden again, but neither was he comfortable in being made to think that he didn't much care how the war went for the time being, except in so far as it affected himself. As for Ronald Inverell, surely he had earned the right to enjoy his life again! He would bear the marks of it all his days; and he *was* 'doing something,' which it was to be supposed had to be done by somebody.

He said little as the Squire talked on. What was plain from his talk was that he himself was coming to the end of the time when he could benefit from a life of idleness; but he probably did not recognise this as counting in the dissatisfaction he expressed. His

approval of a round of mild gaieties as helping the interned to recover themselves was not entirely ungrudging. It became strong disapproval when he adverted on those who had seized upon it without such an excuse. Fiddling while Rome was burning—that was the burden of his charge against the life immediately around him. John Spence was depressed by his tirade, but inclined to think there was something in it.

He told Nancy so when he went up to her, and she was greatly disturbed. 'Oh, my darling old thing, she said. *Please* don't worry yourself about that, or about anything, just now. Just leave it all alone. Father doesn't understand yet. But he will. I'm sure he will in time.'

VII

ONE sign that the Squire was beginning to get back to himself was that he talked more about Kencote than he had done at any time since he had become obsessed by the idea of the war.

It came about naturally. He and John Spence were both large landowners, and the war was already deeply affecting the business of agriculture. There was room for endless discussion of measures that were being taken by the Government, and of controversies that were being aroused by those measures, some of the experts taking this line and some taking that. Spence's own agent was a recognised expert, whose views sometimes appeared in letters to the papers. His large property was in safe hands, and he had no need to worry himself over details.

The Squire did not employ an agent of that calibre

at Kencote. He had always managed his estates himself, with the help of a bailiff, and for a good many years he and Dick had managed them in conjunction. Dick understood the business as well as any professionally trained agent could have done, and had really decided everything, though he had apparently deferred to his father's authority.

Fortunately, the Squire held to the views of Webster, Spence's agent, in the various controversies that were on foot at this time, and had acted upon them. There was, therefore, no difference of opinion between him and John as to the course that ought to be shaped. But that course sometimes involved sharp criticism of Government action, which opened the door for a good many tirades against the way the war was being run in England. These tirades never failed to depress John's spirits, and Nancy grew to dread them. But she was generally able to turn them back to a discussion of the effect of the changes upon Kencote itself.

One day, at luncheon, when they had been talking over some far-reaching regulation that had recently been announced, the Squire said: 'Dick and I used to talk about that. He agreed with me absolutely.'

Having mentioned Dick's name, he bethought himself, and his face changed. John said: 'Poor old Dick! His opinion was worth having. I don't think he'd have stood for this new move.'

The Squire went on talking, but in a lower key, and Dick's name was not mentioned again.

The next time, however, that estate affairs were under discussion, he brought it in himself, not inadvertently, but as if he had made up his mind to do so. It seemed as if he wanted to connect the son whom he had lost with this subject which had been the chief interest in his life, and the greatest tie between them.

But it was made plain, somehow, that he was not yet ready to talk of Dick's death.

What he did come to talk about quite freely was Walter's heirship to the property, which, Nancy had told John, was a subject he had never mentioned up to this time. To that extent he had accustomed himself to Dick's loss, and to that extent his life-long preoccupations once more had sway with him.

Walter, the third of the four Clinton sons, had been intended for Holy Orders, and the reversion of the comfortable rectory of Kencote, now held by the Squire's half-brother. But he had chosen to be a doctor. At the outbreak of the war he had been in good practice as a consultant in Harley Street, and the Squire's distaste for his profession, as being against the tradition of such a family as the Clintons, had given way to satisfaction at his success. Walter had, of course, 'joined up,' at the very beginning, and had quickly gone up the ladder. He was now a Colonel—up to his eyes in work with the armies in France—and not unlikely to become a Surgeon-General if the war lasted on.

It was significant of the Squire's way of looking at things that this son, who had accomplished far more than any of the four in the varied activities of the war, should have to be almost apologised for.

Dick had retired from his regiment as a Captain, and rejoined as a Captain. Humphrey had not reached Captain's rank before he had been killed. Frank, the youngest son, had been a lieutenant in the Navy at the beginning of the war, and had only recently become a Lieutenant-Commander. He was doing his quiet, unremitting work with the rest, but there was no opportunity for him of a brilliant rise. None of the Clintons, except Walter, had done more than what thousands of others had done, though two of them had

lost their lives in doing it. But the Squire never mentioned Walter to his new acquaintances without that half-apology. 'He was in his militia for a few years before he took up this doctoring,' he would say. 'But, of course, doctors are just the people they can't spare, unfortunately, or he'd have been fighting. Still, I'm glad he's making himself useful. He's a clever fellow, and they're giving him plenty to do.'

All the younger generation of Clintons had brains, as the saying goes, which they had probably inherited from their mother's family, but Walter was the only one of them who had used his to conspicuous advantage. His taste for country pursuits had been as strong as any of his brothers', in their youth, and had provided the chief of his recreations since he had become immersed in the work of his profession. But John and Nancy had discussed between themselves whether he would be content to turn himself into the entire country gentleman, as Dick had done, as Humphrey would have done, if his death had not closely followed Dick's; and as Frank would do, if he were the heir. Would the Squire expect it of him? He would certainly have expected it but for the war. Whether he thought of it now would be a strong indication as to how the obsession of the war still affected him.

One morning there came a letter from Walter. Beyond the statement that he was well, and had sent his love to John and Nancy, the Squire vouchsafed no information as to what the letter had contained; but it seemed that he was not quite pleased with it. He was moody and rather irritable during the rest of the day, but in the evening, over the dinner-table, it all came out.

Walter had suggested his asking Webster, John's agent, to find somebody like himself for Kencote, who would take the responsibility of management off

their shoulders, and in whom they could have confidence.

'I don't say it's not a good idea,' said the Squire grudgingly, 'and if the war is to go on through this winter I shall probably do it. But I had hoped that Walter would have settled down at Kencote, where he'll belong now for the rest of his life, and set his own mind to the business. He'd have a good deal to learn, but not everything; and he's clever at picking up things. He's made a success of this doctoring business, but there's no need to keep on at that now.'

'Well, he couldn't very well give it up before the war's over,' said John. 'After that I suppose he might.'

'He says he'll be wanted after the war,' grumbled the Squire. 'I should have thought there'd have been plenty of them without him.'

Nancy liked to have things quite direct. 'Does he want to go on doctoring permanently?' she asked.

The Squire didn't know *what* he wanted. He had said 'after the war.' He didn't seem to take any interest in Kencote at all. The Squire had written to him before leaving England about a good many points that he didn't want to decide upon without him, and he had answered none of his questions; he had thrown all the responsibilities back on his shoulders, and made this suggestion of an agent.

'Too busy to think about it, I expect,' said John. 'I should get an agent if I were you, Mr Clinton, and as soon as possible. Webster is sure to know of somebody. I'll write to him if you like.'

The Squire hummed and ha'd, and finally accepted the proposal. The discussion lasted for two or three days, and it became plain that Walter had quite definitely refused to concern himself with Kencote at present, or to bind himself to anything for the future.

VIII

WHEN the Squire had been at Montex for a fortnight, and was beginning to talk about going home again, another letter came from Walter to say that he had secured a week's leave, and permission to spend it in Switzerland. He would be with them two days later.

Nancy breathed a deep sigh of relief. The situation was getting beyond her control. The Squire had recovered his health and had thrown off much of the heavy depression that had been sitting on him like a nightmare. But his recovery brought no solace to those who were living with him, and would certainly bring none to those to whom he would soon be returning. His disapproval of the unstrenuous life that was being lived immediately around him was beginning to be felt, though he thought he was hiding it. He was not quite so popular among the *internés* and their families as he had been, and some of his speeches were beginning to be put about, perhaps exaggerated, and to be resented.

And his companionship now definitely had a bad effect upon John Spence, who was not yet in a state of mind to resist worries brought to him from outside. Nancy knew that if she had had him alone, and surrounded him with the little interests and pleasures of an idle, unreflective life, in those beautiful surroundings, sheltered, and to all present intents free, he would have been his old self in a very short time. But he was already feeling himself confined, kicking against the fate that kept him inactive while so much still remained to be done, and brooding over the delinquencies of others, of which the old Squire was always so full. She asked herself more than once whether she had been

right in encouraging her father to come out to Switzerland with her. If he should not be sent back more in tune with the world than he had been, but should only have hindered her husband's recovery, she would much regret it.

The fact was that he wanted managing—always. Mrs Clinton in her quiet, composed way, had an influence over him; so had Virginia, his daughter-in-law. But their influence had not been strong enough in this overpowering trouble. Dick had managed him beautifully. Would Walter be able to?

Nancy had faith in Walter. He was very competent and level-headed. Dick had been that too, but with a coolness and apparent absence of effort that was not so marked in Walter. It was that calm air that Lad told upon the Squire; and all Dick's activities of mind and body had been concerned with the things with which the Squire was also concerned. Walter's was a wider range. His mastery over the affairs of his life had touched his father only here and there. His word would not have the weight that Dick's had had, and he was not so likely to gauge the points at which he might exercise pressure and the points where he must tread lightly.

But he had a very quick understanding. And it seemed likely that he had decided to spend the days of his rare leave in Switzerland because he saw that something wanted doing there. His wife and children were at home in England and he had not seen them for months.

All three of them were to have gone to Lausanne to meet him, but in those early days of internment restrictions were made rather irksome, and John was refused permission to absent himself for a night. Nancy stayed with him, but wished she could have had Walter's ear for a time before her father had it exclusively. It

seemed almost as if he himself wanted to have his voluminous say first, for there was small reason for him to undertake the journey, and to submit himself to the unfamiliar rigours of a foreign hotel, for the sake of meeting Walter early the next morning, and accompanying him back to Montex by the earliest possible train.

They arrived in the afternoon, and on the first opportunity Walter said to Nancy: 'Arrange for you and me to go out for a walk. I want to talk to you.'

Nancy's heart lightened. It had been inclined to sink when she had seen, on their arrival, her father evidently out of humour about something, and Walter as evidently playing the part of seeing nothing to put anybody out of humour. Walter was only marking time until he could decide in consultation with her the course he was to pursue.

Walter was indeed a man to rely on. Even the Squire, in spite of his air of general dissatisfaction, responded to his cheerful leadership as they sat over the tea-table, and John was more his old responsive self than he had been since the first few days of their arrival. Walter seemed to bring a new breath of optimism and decision into the atmosphere. He was in private clothes, as a visitor to a neutral country, but there was an air of military authority about him, and he looked like a soldier, with his upright, active figure and his small, clipped moustache. The Squire let fall some observations which showed him still regretful that this son of his was not a combatant officer; but Walter put them aside, not without a hint of impatience. He was too big a man to be hankering after the extra kudos that fighting rank would have brought him. He was doing the work for which his life training had fitted him, and all his thoughts were centred on it.

It was this point upon which he first expressed himself to Nancy, when presently they were alone together, walking up a high mountain path behind the village. 'I wish father could get some sense of values into his head,' he said. 'I really believe he'd rather see me a middle-aged captain, with everything to learn about my job, than doing what I can do better than most.'

'Poor old father!' said Nancy hastily. 'Walter, dear, you mustn't be impatient with him. He has had so much to make him sad, and to upset him altogether. I believe he really *is* getting better, and all his little old tiresomeness cropping up again show it. I'm so thankful you have come. I believe you can put him right, and John too. But you will have to be careful. It's of no use to get at loggerheads with him.'

Walter laughed good-humouredly. 'Just a little private grumble,' he said. 'I think I can see how the land lies. I came here to see if I could put things right. Jolly glad to see you and John, old girl, and the Governor too; but I'd have gone home to Muriel and the kiddies if it hadn't been for that. Let's sit down here, and you shall tell me all about it.'

They sat on the edge of a grassy bank overlooking the valley and the mountains beyond it. Far beneath them lay the village, and they could see the tennis courts, with little white figures moving about without any apparent purpose. All around them were the flowers and deep grasses of the pastures, and in their ears the continual boom and tinkle of the cow-bells.

'It's a jolly enough place to come to, all the same,' said Walter. 'I wish Muriel were here.'

'Dear old boy!' said Nancy, laying her hand affectionately upon his knee. 'I thought you had come because of that. I should have had to try to do something myself if you hadn't, because father is having such a bad effect upon John. I can see it

plainly. But I don't think I could have done much. I believe you can.'

Walter listened to everything she had to tell him, and she felt his sympathy and understanding. 'I should know you were a splendid doctor, Walter dear,' she said, with a smile, 'even if I didn't know anything about you, except that you were one. You make me feel that you can put everything right.'

'My bedside manner, eh?' he said. 'Well, I'll do my best. Poor old father! I understand him better now. He can't get used to Dick's death. That's at the bottom of it all. I wish I could make him believe that I could take his place, in the only way that would satisfy him. But that's just where the difficulty is going to be.'

'What are you going to do about—about all that?' Nancy asked him, after a pause.

He paused too, before answering her. 'I don't allow myself to look far ahead,' he said. 'I think one mustn't, just now. As long as the war lasts—and I'm not one of those who believe it will be over this year, or next either—I shall have work to do that will take every ounce of energy that I have. And when the actual fighting does come to an end my work will go on—I don't know for how long. My mind is full of it. When I have time to think about myself, which isn't very often, it seems to me that all my life has been leading up to this. If it's a career that the poor old Governor wants—— Oh, well, I don't want to buck, but perhaps I can say it to you—I've got the sense of mastery all the time; I can rise to the very top of the tree, because it's *my* job, that I've spent all these years working for. And it's one of the finest jobs a man can set his hand and brain to. I shall be careful not to show impatience with him again, but it does annoy one rather, when one is in the thick of all that's

going on now, and absolutely absorbed by it, to be expected to give one's mind to twopenny halfpenny little details about farm buildings at Kencote, and the grass that is to be ploughed up, and all that sort of thing.'

'Yes, I can see all that, Walter, dear. John can, too. We are awfully proud of you, dear old boy. You are doing more than any of us in the family could have done. But it's difficult for father. Kencote has been almost his religion, as Joan and I said the other day. It has gone on for hundreds of years. The Squire of Kencote is a very important person in father's eyes.'

'Well, I'm not going to belittle his importance in the scheme of things. But it isn't actually the man who happens to be Squire of Kencote at any time that is of importance. What importance has father himself just now? Scarcely any. I myself—I'm of more importance, even now, than I shall ever be as Squire of Kencote, though it isn't the sort of importance that counts with him.'

'Yes, I can see that too. So can John. He's a big landowner too, but he says himself that he doesn't amount to more than any other old dug-out. I suppose dear Dick was the same.'

'It's the line that matters. I suppose I'm as keen on that as father is, and on Kencote itself being what it has always been. But there's no trouble about that at all. I don't suppose Dick would have had any children, if he'd lived; and Humphrey never seemed to want to marry again. Little Richard would have succeeded eventually, as he will now. Perhaps he would have been brought up to it. I believe Dick wanted that, from one or two things he said to me. Father always hoped Dick would have a son, but I think he and Virginia had resigned themselves. Anyhow, little Richard will be brought up to it now. For myself, I want to be left free.'

'Aren't you glad at all that you'll be Squire of Kencote by-and-by?'

'It doesn't make up to me in the least for Dick being killed,' he said shortly.

'Oh, Walter dearest, you know I don't mean that.'

She knew what close friends the brothers had been, from their childhood. Humphrey had stood rather apart from either of them; Frank was some years younger, and had been much away. In spite of the difference in their lives, the tie between Dick and Walter had only drawn closer.

'Kencote has always meant Dick to me when I looked forward,' he said simply. 'If I think of it as mine, it's like putting him farther off. Besides, I have my own line in life, and I've followed it now for fifteen years or more. If I'd been the eldest son, I should have taken up the business of estate management just as Dick did—but even he soldiered, you know, for years before he settled down. I should have enjoyed it too. I've got a lot of the countryman in me, and it's well worth doing, with a big property like Kencote; I don't deny that. But it's a business all the same, and I've trained myself for another one, which I think is better.'

'Yes, I know. But if you can't help becoming Squire of Kencote you can't help taking the responsibilities.'

'I can help devoting myself to all the details. It's very few big landowners who give themselves up to it as father does and as he expects me to do. What happens with all the big people who go in for politics? Or the big bankers and business men who own large properties? Or the great soldiers and sailors who come from our sort of people? One can't help feeling that if I had got on as far as I have in *any* profession except the one that's actually mine, he would take it for granted that I should stick to it and get on in it

still further. The property would have to be managed by somebody else, as it *will* have to be, and he'd be quite satisfied. Of course, I shall be at Kencote a good deal, and Muriel and the children perhaps more than I shall. We shan't let the old traditions die. I believe in them. There are a good many changes coming in land-owning, many of them as a result of this war; but as long as there are big landowners, and I'm one of them, I shall be keen to preserve what has been good in it in the past. We shall always know our people and be friends with them. It won't only be a hard matter of business.'

'That always has been the best thing about the old type of Squire, hasn't it? John feels that too. I think if you can persuade father that you look at it in that way, he will be satisfied. And do try to get him to worry himself less about the war, Walter. And talk to John, too. He has done all he can, poor darling, and he ought not to be so sad that he can't do anything more.'

'That's where I shall get father both ways,' said Walter elliptically.

IX

THERE was to be a dance at one of the hotels the night after Walter's arrival, to which 'everybody' was going. He heard about it as he was standing with John and Nancy in the tennis pavilion, talking to some people to whom they had introduced him. 'That'll be jolly,' he said. 'Why didn't you tell me, Nancy?'

'We hadn't thought of going,' said Nancy, with a glance at John. 'We haven't been to any of the dances yet.'

'Oh, that's because Mr Clinton doesn't approve of

our amusing ourselves,' said a sprightly little lady of the group, 'but it will do you both a lot of good, and I'm sure it won't do him any harm. Do come, Mrs Spence; we shall have lots of fun.'

'Yes, we'll come,' said Walter. 'I haven't danced since before the war.'

They made their way slowly up to the chalet for luncheon. 'I don't think I shall go,' said John. 'The old man doesn't like it, and I'm not sure he isn't right. We ought not to be dancing with all this going on.'

'It's just what we ought to be doing,' said Walter lightly, 'when we're taking a holiday. That's what you're doing at the present moment, John, and the more lively you make it the better man you'll be. I know you and Nancy like dancing together, and as Mrs Fetherston says, it will do you both a world of good.'

'I think we will, John,' said Nancy. 'Walter's a doctor, and he orders it for us.'

'The old man won't like it,' said John again.

Nancy looked at Walter rather anxiously. Was John to be 'managed' too, or taken into their confidence? Walter had told her that there was nothing in his state to worry herself about, but she felt that he was watching him carefully all the time, and was not sure that he was so satisfied about him as he professed to be. She was greatly relieved when he answered at once: 'Look here, old man, you've been paying a great deal too much attention to the Governor's little grumbles. We've got to get him out of his way of looking at things, and send him home more easy in his mind. I'll tackle him about this dance, which will do as well as anything else to start on; and you and Nancy must back me up.'

It seemed to Nancy that John was pleased with this

speech; but all he said was: 'It is a serious business, you know, Walter—this war. The old man is quite right to object to people taking it lightly.'

'Of course he is—the people who have any of the responsibility of it. Where he's wrong is in expecting *anybody* to keep at high pressure all the time. You don't get things done in that way. We've set ourselves as a nation to beat the Boche, and every one of us who can do something must keep himself fit to do it as well as he can.'

'I can't do anything, worse luck!'

'You can keep up your spirits, old boy, and wait for the next move. You may not be kept here till the end of the war. And at the present moment you can do a good deal. You can help to send father home ready to keep up other people's spirits, instead of depressing them, as he's been doing up till now. We shall have to draw a good deal more on our reserve force before we're through with this.'

'I don't see what that's got to do with dancing the Turkey Trot in Switzerland,' said John. 'I should like to dance with Nancy again, though. I'll see how you tackle the old man about it, and back you up.'

It happened that the Squire was not in a very good temper. He had had letters to write that morning, and had forgone his usual visit to the tennis club, which he rather enjoyed. Having forgone it, he was inclined to disapprove of those who spent their time in gossiping, when they might be doing something useful, such as writing business letters to England. He had made a virtue of staying indoors, and consequently, when he had got through his correspondence, and there were still some three-quarters of an hour before luncheon, he had not liked to stultify himself by spending the interval in the pavilion, which was only five minutes walk from the chalet. So he had stayed indoors, with

nothing to do, and was slightly annoyed with everybody but himself in consequence. It must be admitted that he was rather a tiresome, foolish old man; but he was perhaps easier to manage in that state than when his causes of discontent had gone so much deeper. Those causes still existed, but they had become overlaid by the trifles upon which he now exercised his capacity for worrying himself and other people.

He drew his shaggy brows together when Walter introduced the subject of the dance, and said he thought that sort of thing might be left to people who hadn't yet woke up to what was going on.

'That's a view we sometimes discuss, out there,' said Walter. 'There's something to be said on both sides.'

The Squire was slightly mollified. 'I can only see one side,' he said. 'The men in the field—they're standing up to it. They don't grumble at the wounds and the pain, and the filth, and all the beastliness they have to go through.'

'Oh, don't they?' said Walter lightly. 'You should hear them at it. They grouse like anything, but they laugh at it too, and then they go and do what's wanted of them, and laugh about that too, unless they happen to get killed. I think the British Tommy is one of the finest types you'll find anywhere; but as for grouching——!'

'I don't suppose the British Tommy has much sympathy with the fellows of his class who are shirking at home,' said the Squire, 'making money out of the jobs he has given up, and letting him down by striking if they can't get exactly what they want.'

'No, he hasn't. But he has no objection to people at home enjoying themselves, as long as they do their share of the work. It's what we're always trying to get for the Tommy himself—enjoyment—recreation.

You see, father, we've settled down to this war as a long, hard business, which must be run on the same principles as any other big business. The actual fighting is the smallest part of it, if you reckon the number of men and the number of hours spent over it compared with the number of men and the number of hours preparing for it. You'll get the best results if you make it all as regular and normal as you possibly can. Give a man enough food and sleep and recreation outside his times of work, and take the burden of his work off his shoulders when he isn't actually at it. Then you'll get the work done with the least friction and to the best advantage.'

'Oh, yes, I see all that, Walter,' said the Squire with some impatience. 'I'm not a fool, and I've done some soldiering in my time, though I never saw active service. I've never said there was anything wrong with our armies. It's the people who aren't in them who are not doing their duty. At least a great many of them aren't, and that's why I'm against all this merry-making, and "life as usual," and all that sort of thing. It means leaving it to the fighting men, and those who haven't got a sense of duty about it standing outside.'

'There's a good deal in that,' said John. 'When you're fighting you feel that you're doing your share. When you're not, you do stand outside, and you don't feel happy about it.'

'It's different for you, John,' said the Squire handsomely. 'You've done all you can.'

'*Your* duty's plain enough, my dear old John,' said Walter. 'You've got to get yourself fit, and to keep up your spirits. So have all the rest of you here. This is one of the few places in Europe at the present moment where getting as much amusement as possible is a positive duty. That's one reason why I came to it. I've been working like a nigger myself, and I want

to put it all aside for a week, so that I can go back and work like a nigger again till the time comes for another leave. We'll all go and dance to-night, and stay in bed late to-morrow.'

The Squire made no further protest, but after luncheon, smoking with Walter on the veranda, he said: 'I dare say you're right about John amusing himself—poor fellow! It's all these other people here who haven't done what he and the rest of them have——'

Walter took him up decisively. 'You must consider them part of the show, I think, father. They are useful in helping the prisoners to amuse themselves, and to forget that they are prisoners. I'm a bit worried about John. I wanted to talk to you about him. He's thinking far more than he ought about being a prisoner. There's no practical reason for him to think of himself as one at all, here—at least not now, at the beginning. I've been keeping my eyes and ears open. I should say he's in a worse state than almost any of them.'

The Squire exclaimed: 'Why, his shoulder is getting better every day,' he said. 'And there's nothing else the matter with him.'

'I mean mentally,' said Walter shortly.

The Squire stared, with his mouth open.

'What I was saying at lunch was a good deal to his address,' Walter went on. 'I want you to back me up as far as you can in taking his mind off the war.'

'What do you mean—mentally?' asked the Squire, ignoring this.

Walter looked at him. 'Can't you see he's getting into a state of melancholy?' he asked. 'It's plain enough to me as a doctor.'

John came out of the house at that moment, and Nancy soon afterwards. The Squire took small part in the conversation which followed, but cast frequent

glances at his son-in-law, and seemed to be in much perplexity.

They went out to tea that afternoon, to a chalet on the hill, where there were a lot of people, and much agreeable conversation. During the course of it, the Squire made some pronouncement upon shirkers at home in England, and immediately chanced to catch Walter's eye frowning a warning at him. This gave him further food for reflection.

X

THE result of the Squire's reflections was the surprising but not unencouraging one of his accompanying the other three to the dance that evening. His statement that he didn't care about staying at home alone, and might as well go with them if they weren't going to be very late, was received with enthusiasm, but not, of course, with any surprise at his change of face. John Spence seemed to be most pleased with his decision. 'We shan't stay very long,' he said; 'just a few dances, and talking to people—I really don't think there's much harm in it, Squire.'

The Squire's eyes dropped at the rather touching look of appeal in his. 'Oh, no harm at all, John,' he said, quickly and kindly. 'I've been making a bit too much of it, perhaps. *Here* it's all right.'

This readiness to give up his prejudices, whenever he was able to see them to be so, was part of the change that the war had brought him. Nancy put her arm into his, and gave it a grateful squeeze. 'Dear old Daddy!' she said. 'You're taking a holiday too. You must enjoy yourself as much as you can before you go back.'

The Squire, though it may be supposed that his dancing as well as his fighting days were long since over, had been accustomed to adorn County Balls and Hunt Balls and the like with his presence at home in England. He had liked meeting his friends in that way, in surroundings not of every day, and had passed away contented hours, with talk and occasional refreshment, pleased with the music and movement around him.

His enjoyment this evening was of the same character and greater, in the early stages of the entertainment, than he had anticipated. The dancing was in the large hall of the hotel, and he told one or two that it was rather like the Assembly Rooms at Bathgate, which it wasn't at all, except for the music, and the dancing couples, and the people who sat round and looked on.

There were young men there who didn't dance—some who would never dance again. One, who walked habitually with a stick, hobbling painfully on a felt slippered foot, suddenly seized a partner and danced a round of the room as if every muscle and sinew in his body were as apt for his service as his three and twenty years demanded, then limped to his seat again and recovered his rubber-shod stick, still laughing and talking gaily. Men with one arm or a damaged hand made necessary adjustments with their partners, and thanked their lucky stars that they were sound on their feet. Conscious enjoyment seemed even a trifle higher than in a crowd with the normal number of sound limbs.

The sense of high courage and making the best of things had its appeal for the Squire, and it was deepened for him by a lady to whom he was talking, the mother of one of the boys who was there, enjoying himself with the same light-hearted gaiety as if he had been

finishing up his three years at Cambridge with a May-week ball, as he might have been but for the war. His right arm had been taken off at the shoulder, and he was gaining much amusement from instructing his successive partners how to dance 'left-footed.'

He had left Cambridge, and the certainty of a cricket 'blue,' at the end of his first year, trained hard for his commission for six months, gone out, been wounded and 'taken' almost immediately, spent months of pain and misery in a bad hospital, followed by more months of confinement in a bad prison camp; and so spent the two years in which he would have gained his athletic triumphs, and lived the life which provides perhaps the happiest of all memories of a man's youth.

His mother told his history to the Squire, who listened sympathetically—much more sympathetically than he had been accustomed to listen to such confidences as a mother's about her son, especially, it must be confessed, one who was not marked out for the sort of career followed by young men of his own class.

'About the cricket and the games,' she said, 'I'm not so dreadfully sorry as perhaps I ought to be, as it means so much to him to lose them. But they were getting in the way of his work. It was very important that he should take a good degree, as he was to have been a schoolmaster, and I'm afraid he wasn't working so hard as he might have done. I don't know what will happen now. Even if he goes back to Cambridge he will have lost a lot of time. And he says he doesn't want to go back, with so many of his friends killed, and he so much older. However, nothing much matters at present, beside the fact that he is here, and I can see him happy again. Oh, I do want to keep him happy, and young, Mr Clinton. He has been through so much, and he is only a boy still. I like nothing so much as

to see him merry and enjoying himself—even if the difficulties of life are coming when this respite is over.'

The Squire felt some compunction at this half appeal, and would have felt more if he had divined that he was looked upon in Montex as an obstacle to the frank enjoyment of these times of respite. But he had his word of comfort. He had always seen plainly—more plainly than many of his generation—the debt owing to the youth of the fighting nations. 'Ah, it's the young fellows who are doing it all for us, if you look deep enough,' he said. 'It's they who are paying the price, and some of them will go on paying it for the rest of their lives. We shan't forget that, when it comes to setting them up again—those who are left.'

Unfortunately for the Squire's immediate peace of mind, though not perhaps for the ultimately beneficial effect that this evening's adjustments had upon him, he did not escape a sharper pointing of the moral which his stay in Montex should have brought home to him.

Little Mrs Fetherston, the wife of a happy-go-lucky subaltern who had married her during a fortnight's leave and gone back to the front again to be immediately wounded and taken prisoner, was furious with the Squire. Her husband seemed to have nothing the matter with him at all, and was one of the few whose release was considered a stupendous piece of luck. He was a noisy, racketsy youth, and she was not less noisy and racketsy. If there had been many like this couple, the Squire's strictures would have been justified, and he had not been alone in passing them upon the Fetherstons.

Since her slight encounter with him at the tennis club that morning, Mrs Fetherston had 'heard something.' She came up to the Squire with her pretty,

common little face aflame. 'I'm surprised to see you here, Mr Clinton,' she said, in a voice that trembled. 'I thought you objected to our having a little fun.'

The Squire rose from his seat. He saw that there was something to meet—something more even than was meant by her words. His brain did not move quickly, but he said quietly: 'Oh, no; or I shouldn't be here.'

She, at least, was quick enough. 'And *we* shouldn't be here if you had your way,' she flashed at him. 'I hear you've been saying that Alfred ought to be sent back to Germany, and that it would do me good to go with him.'

It was exactly what he had said, in open speech; but he was none the less struck full by the charge, and could only falter: 'I shouldn't mean a thing like that, Mrs Fetherston, whatever I might say.'

She took no notice of this. She had worked herself up to 'tell him what she thought of him.'

'I don't know why you are here at all,' she said, her voice no longer trembling, 'instead of doing something in England, as you're always talking about. Alfred has *fought*, at any rate, and been *wounded*, and for over a year in prison; and I've only seen him for ten days since we've been married, till I came here. And he's young, and I'm young, and we want to forget it. Go back to Germany indeed! I wish *you'd* gone through what he did while he was there. That would give you something to remember. You'd get on with the *Germans*. You behave like one yourself.'

She flounced off. Perhaps she was afraid of bursting into angry tears; perhaps she had used up her prepared material too quickly, for it is probable that the last sentence had been intended for the climax. But her departure was the most effective clinching of the attack that she could have used.

The Squire was left speechless, but scandalised in the highest degree. Fortunately he was in a comparatively empty corner not far from the band, and it was doubtful whether Mrs Fetherston's speech had been heard by any one except the lady to whom he had been talking, who had herself been strongly critical of Mrs Fetherston's behaviour.

'Odious, common little cat!' was this lady's only comment upon the episode; and the Squire was enabled to recover himself somewhat, as she continued her conversation with him on the same lines as before the attack.

But it became plain before the evening was out, by the curious looks that were cast at the poor Squire, that Mrs Fetherston had been spreading the news of her triumph; and it was not by any means to be taken for granted from the other lady's temporary reticence that she would not also become a sounding-board, of a lower but not less damaging reverberance.

Nancy and John and Walter had all heard something of what had happened, and heard the indignant account of the Squire himself as they walked slowly home in the summer night. They sympathised with him, of course, and Nancy said that there would be no difficulty now about cutting Mrs Fetherston, for which she was glad. But by the time they reached home and the Squire had worked off some of his indignation, he began to be aware that of the three of them Walter was not quite so advanced in his censure of Mrs Fetherston as he could have wished, and to suffer some disquiet from his aloofness.

John and Nancy went up to bed. Walter said he would smoke a pipe on the veranda before turning in, and the Squire, in defiance of his usual habits, said that he would smoke a cigar with him.

XI

'I DON'T know when I've been so annoyed by anything in my life,' said the Squire, when he and Walter were alone together. 'But perhaps it's best to forget all about it. I wouldn't have had a speech like that repeated, and I wish I could remember who I said it to, if I did say it——'

'You said it to me for one,' said Walter.

'Oh,' said the Squire, somewhat taken aback. 'Well, I don't suppose you repeated it, and I wouldn't have had it come to their ears, not exactly in that form. But I dare say it won't do 'em any harm to know what's thought of them. I'm by no means the only one who has been disgusted by the way they behave. Perhaps they'll be a little more careful in the future.'

'Oh, I hope so,' said Walter, stirring in his seat. 'But I think I should be a little more careful, too, if I were you, father—I hope you won't mind my saying this. Most of the men have had a pretty bad time, and it makes trouble to have it known that there's somebody always criticising them.'

'What do you mean—*always* criticising them?' exclaimed the Squire in offence. 'There's nobody who thinks more than I do of what they have done—most of the men here.'

'I know. That's why it's a pity to give a wrong impression. I've been here long enough now to see how things are going. If I didn't know how you do look upon it all, I shouldn't say anything. But I'm afraid there are a good many who are on the look-out for anything you may say which seems to reflect upon them.'

'Why not say at once that I'd better be out of the place.'

Walter was silent.

'Perhaps that's what you think,' suggested the Squire.

'I'm afraid it is, father, unless you can change your views a bit.'

There was a silence. Walter breathed more freely the longer it lasted. He would never have dared to speak so openly in the old days, but he had divined that his father had changed, though there was little in his bearing now to show it, and he had ventured greatly.

'Well, my boy,' said the old man at last, 'I don't resent your plain speaking. 'You wouldn't say a thing like that for the sake of annoying me. I've had a very heavy weight upon me, and sometimes it has seemed more than I could bear. I dare say there are things you can see more clearly than I can.'

Walter was much moved. 'Oh, my dear father,' he said, 'nobody knows better than I do what it has all meant to you. I'd have given a lot to be able to ease it for you if I could. I believe I've thought more about you than about anybody, lately.'

The Squire was moved in his turn. He had been proud of all his sons in their childhood and boyhood, but he had allowed his eldest to fill his thoughts to the exclusion of the others for many years past. The tone in which Walter had spoken showed him that he was not entirely bereft. If he had lost his firstborn, upon whom his hopes had been set, here was a son, of fine character and achievement, who still cared for him.

'My dear boy,' he said, 'I want nothing better than that we should work it all out together, for as long as I'm spared. I'm getting old. I don't see all round a thing as I used to. I've had a better head than mine to depend on all these years. I feel lost sometimes without it.'

Walter had never heard his father speak like this in all the years of his life. He was profoundly touched. He had known that he would have to settle the question of his own future before he could hope to influence him towards a more wholesome outlook, and had puzzled his brain as to how it was to be done without presenting him with another grievance. Now, for the moment, he was almost minded to give way completely, to give up everything for his father's sake, so that his loss might be less to him, and he might live out the rest of his days in contentment.

But the impulse was only momentary. He had thought it all out so carefully, and knew beyond doubt where his duty lay.

'If I were doing anything else but what I am doing, father,' he said, 'I think I should give it up, after the war, to settle down at Kencote, and be with you. I know I shall have duties there, which I haven't had before; and I shan't neglect them. But I've thought a lot about it, and it seems to me clear enough that there are other duties which come before them.'

'Oh, just now, of course, there are,' said the Squire, in a tone as if he were putting a weakness away from him. 'Nothing comes before duty to one's country. Nobody feels that more strongly than I do.'

'Well, if you'll let me tell you how it strikes me, I hope you'll be able to see it as I do.'

The Squire was about to speak, but Walter went on hurriedly: 'Just at present, the outstanding business is to beat the Germans. But, you see, my job isn't even to beat the Germans.'

'What do you mean, Walter? You're not fighting; but you're doing work that has to be done. If I've said anything that looks as if I made little of it—it's not what I mean.'

'I'm doing work that has to be done; yes. But only

a little of it would help us to win; perhaps only the men we mend up so that they can go back and fight. The rest of it is putting right what the war is destroying, so that the world can go on.' .

The Squire did not quite understand this; but he was in a receptive mood, and waited for more.

'What are we fighting for?' Walter went on. 'If you look behind it all, it's just so that our own country, and other countries who are with us, shall keep our freedom, to live our lives in our own way, and not in the way the Germans want to impose on the world. We've fought for that before, and it's worth fighting for. But when we've finished fighting, and established our freedom again, there will come years and years in which we shall have to mend up what the war has broken. That's what it seems to me that men in my position must keep before them. Our work will be at its very climax when the fighting ends.'

'Yes, I see that,' said the Squire rather unwillingly. 'But it won't be only the wounded men who will want setting right. There's the land, and labour questions, and so forth. We shall be in the thick of all sorts of difficulties, for years to come. Landowners will be attacked—not a doubt about it. People like ourselves, who own land, won't be able any longer to draw their rents and leave it to somebody else to do the work for them. If we can't show that we have our place to fill, and a very important place, and are doing our duty by the people dependent on us—well, we shan't be able to defend ourselves, and we shall go under. To my mind, it's the duty of a landowner nowadays—whatever it may have been in the past—to live on his estates, and to make them the chief interest of his life. If we had all done that, there'd *be* no land question; or at least we should be recognised as the people who know more about the land than anybody, instead of

being looked upon simply as standing in the way of progress.'

Walter listened carefully to this speech. He did not find it merely prejudiced, as so many of his father's speeches on this all-important question had been apt to be. The Squire was already of a past generation, but according to his lights he had done his duty and perhaps more than his duty. The principles upon which land had been held for centuries past were based upon a rock of right and justice, and any tampering with them was to be resisted, not only on behalf of his own order, but as a grave danger to the State. But he had recognised all his life the responsibilities that go with landed possessions. If he had looked upon his tenantry as subject to him in many ways that no longer march with the ideals of a free democracy, he had yet shown a sense of human identity with them not always inherent in democratic movements. He and they were not merely employer and employed. With all the differences between them, differences designed by a wise and over-ruling Providence, they were of the same flesh and blood, and came together in many aspects of life which elsewhere revealed only impassable gulfs. It was a conviction worthy of respect that it was the duty of a landowner to live among his people and make himself one with them.

'I think that you have brought us all up with a right view of those questions,' Walter said. 'I agree with you entirely in them. There's no need to discuss what is to be done as long as the war lasts. I have my work to do and you have yours; there are no changes to be made. But after the war I should expect to make Kencote my home. I mean if I can have a house there; Muriel and the children will live there, and I should be there as much as possible.'

'Well, that's all I want, Walter. It's for you to

take poor dear Dick's place. I'd never have said a word of my own accord about Virginia leaving the Dower House. If she'd wanted she could have lived there as long as I lived. But she said herself that when we went back to the house she'd like to come with us. Your mother loves her, and so do I; and she loves us. We bear each other up. She said herself that you ought to live in the Dower House, after the war. She's wonderful in that way. Not a thought about your taking Dick's place, as of course you must do—I mean in the way in which it would affect *her*.'

'Oh, I know. She's wonderful—dear Virginia! I'm glad she's to be with you and mother, father. She's like a daughter to you. And if you want us to live in the Dower House, after the war, it's what we should like, too.'

'I suppose what you mean is that you'll be up and down a good deal. You won't really make Kencote your home, to look after the place—as Dick did—and have that as your chief interest in life.'

'I couldn't do what Dick did, father. I should only be a bad copy of him. It would be rather painful for me. I think it would be for you, too, in some ways.'

There was a silence. 'You and Dick were always great friends,' said the old man in a low voice.

'Yes,' said Walter simply. 'Always great friends.'

There was another pause. Then the Squire said, in a different tone: 'I don't know that we need talk about it any more, Walter. Perhaps you're right, after all. I can see, anyhow, that your work won't be finished when the war is over—perhaps not for some years after. Kencote must take second place with you. Yes, I see that. But if Muriel and the children are there——!'

'There will be little Richard,' Walter said, 'who

will come after me. You'll have him growing up there, father. I should like him to be to you what you were to your grandfather when you were a child. I think Dick would have liked that, too—for him to be brought up at Kencote. I told Nancy so the other day.'

The Squire brightened. 'Dick and I often talked about him,' he said. 'I always hoped that Dick might have had a son of his own; but—well, that's all over. I should take a great pride—and pleasure—in teaching the boy things, Walter—having him a good deal with me. Yes, it would be something like it was when I was a child—myself, with my grandfather—it doesn't seem so very long ago. I'm fond of the little chap. I've often thought he was growing up very like Dick.'

'I shouldn't want anything better, father. And you'd have a good deal to say in making him so.'

There was a long silence, while both of them were busy with their thoughts.

Walter was feeling a great sense of relief. It had been easier than he had feared. But his father had always been like that. He would cling obstinately to an idea, and back it up with speech so strong, and sometimes so intemperate, that it would seem as if nothing would move him. And then he would give way all of a sudden, and follow out a new idea, perhaps diametrically opposed to the old one, with the same eagerness. The crux was in finding the right word to turn him.

There would be no more trouble now about Walter's own part as heir to Kencote. He would be free to give himself up to the work he had determined to do. The details of estate management would be spared him; and he would not be expected to follow exactly in Dick's footsteps as the Squire had seemed so ardently to desire. He smiled as he told himself that if he were now to turn round and offer to do what his father had

wished up to a few minutes ago, difficulties would probably be put in the way. He grew grave again as he asked himself whether the opportunity had yet come to search for the word that would put his father right with himself in other respects. He would not have done all that he had come to Switzerland hoping to do if he could not send him back to England healed of the worst of his troubles, and in the way of helping others to bear theirs.

But it would be better to wait. This new turn to the Squire's thoughts might of itself bring him to a more stable frame of mind.

The Squire sat with his eyes fixed upon the jagged line of the mountains, but he hardly saw them. A vision of quiet English woods and fields rose before him. He saw himself leading a little child by the hand, talking to him and answering his questions. And sometimes he himself seemed to be the child, the companion of one who had been in his grave fifty years and more. He was happier at this moment than he had been since the war had come crashing in to destroy the ordered life he had lived for all his years, and to ruin the hopes to which that life led.

He had loved Walter's little son, but there had always been mixed up with his love a faint jealousy. In his brain, which did not work logically, there had lodged the idea that this child was the dispossessor of the child who should have been born to his eldest son. But Dick—right in every way—had accepted him as his own successor, and now that maggot was cleared away from his brain. He could take the boy in hand, as he had taken Dick in hand, and taught him to ride and to shoot, and to prepare himself for what was one day coming to him. He had been called after Dick, and Dick was his godfather. He would be almost like Dick's own son. And be very sure that he would

be taught to honour and keep green the memory of the uncle who, born to great possessions, had given them up, and his life as well, when his country had called him.

Yes, Kencote would go on, and it would be he who would train its heir of the third generation to the duties and pleasures that would fall to him, much as he had been trained by its possessor of two generations before his own. There was much solace in that thought. It was possible once more to look forward, where everything seemed to have been brought to a sudden overwhelming end.

By-and-by he began to talk quietly about little Richard, and Walter saw that the healing process had begun. His last words as they parted that night, were: 'I must look about for a pony for him when I get back home. Dick had his first pony when he was much younger. There's no time to lose.'

XII

THE Squire and John Spence were walking across fields from which the hay had now been cut, but with the same panorama of rocky mountain, wood, and upland pasture to keep them company. The Squire was getting rather tired of it, and longing for the softer contours and colours of his own woods and fields. He was going back to England the next day. He had asked John to come for a walk with him that afternoon, and it became plain after a time that he had asked him with a purpose. John knew what it was. But neither of them seemed able to break the ice.

It was not until they had walked a mile, and talked

desultorily about many things, that the Squire said suddenly, 'You were with my boy when he died, John. Tell me all about it.'

John began without any preamble. 'There wasn't much time. I hadn't been able to get to him earlier. He was already slipping away. They couldn't do anything more for him, so they left us alone and I sat by him till he died. He was very glad to see me. He knew he was going. Sometimes he said a few words, and then he seemed to lose consciousness. At the end I just held his hand. I wasn't quite certain when he died. It was as quiet as that.'

'He was terribly wounded, wasn't he? But you said in your letter that he didn't suffer much.'

'They said he didn't, and there weren't any signs of it. You'd only have said he was rather drowsy. He looked just the same, too—his face, and the hand that was outside the coverings. You can think of him, you know, as just passing away quietly, as if he'd had an illness. It isn't always like that.'

'Ah, what wouldn't I have given to be with him!'

'He thought about you. I couldn't tell you everything in a letter, but I've been wanting to.'

'I don't know that I could have stood it before, John. I loved the boy. I couldn't bear the thought of him dead, and everything over. But I want to hear all about it now. It'll bring him closer instead of putting him further off.'

'I've felt like that about it too. There were other fellows who were at school with us, and in the regiment, who have been killed. One just says: "There's So-and-So gone. He was a good fellow." You don't feel it very much; there are too many of them. They've just left off. But being with Dick at the end, it makes it different, somehow. I didn't get over his death for a long time; but it wasn't all trouble either. There

seemed to be more of him left. It'll always be like that.'

'You say he thought about me, John, at the last. Did he mention my name?—send me any message?'

'It wasn't quite like that. If there had been a message I should have written it. But he did mention your name. He was too far gone really to talk, you know. It was just a sentence now and then. When I went in he smiled at me, and said: "Good for you, John. I knew you'd come if you could." Then I sat down by him, and all I could find to say was: "Sorry to see you like this, Dick. I'm glad they got me in time." Then he said: "If you get through, tell Virginia I was thinking about her up to the end; and say I love her." I said: "Yes, I will, Dick." After that he didn't say anything for a bit, but lay with his eyes shut. I think he'd made up his mind to get just that message to her, and had kept his mind to it. I didn't know whether he'd be able to say any more at all, and just sat quiet. Then he opened his eyes again, and talked a little, about Virginia. I can't tell you all he said, but I'll save it up to tell her. I've tried to write it, but it doesn't sound the same. Nancy says I'd better wait. You'll tell her when you get home, won't you?'

'Yes, John.'

'He said: "Father will look after her as long as he lives. He loves her for her own sake as well as for mine."'

They had come to a seat by the field path. The Squire sat down on it, and John sat by him. The old man's voice trembled as he said: 'I made a fuss about his marrying her. I wish to God I hadn't. But it was years ago. He must have forgiven it, John.'

'He wouldn't have said that if he hadn't, would he? He trusted her to you. And to Mrs Clinton too. He

said: "I hope she'll go on living with them. I like to think of her with them at home at Kencote. They'll talk about me as if I were there, too."

'I haven't talked much about him. I couldn't bear to. Now I will. I believe it will take away some of their trouble. I've thought too much about my own, John.'

'Best to talk about the people who're gone, if you love them,' said John laconically.

'Yes, I think so now. Did he say anything more about anything he wanted done?'

'That second time he spoke was the longest. After that it was just a sentence now and then. I think he'd let his mind go free. I suppose that generally happens when they're just sinking, and losing hold. He'd said all he really wanted to say. He had sent his message to Virginia, and left her to you and Mrs. Clinton, and felt at rest about her. That's exactly as it struck me at the time. It wasn't only the words he said. If there had been anything he wanted settled about her he'd have saved himself up to say it. What he wanted was to let her know what she was to him up to the last. After that he'd know he couldn't do anything more for her—more than you would do of your own accord.'

'You really think that was in his mind, John? You're not saying it only to bring me comfort?'

'I'm quite *sure* that was how it was with him. His mind was at rest.'

'Well, it *is* a comfort. And it's a trust. God bless the dear boy! He knew he could trust her to me—to us. His mother will be glad to have it like that when I tell her. Then after, John? What more did he say before he died?'

'Very little more. A sentence now and then, with his eyes closed. It reminded me of a child feeling very

sleepy, but not wanting to go off to sleep. It was then he took hold of my hand—poor, dear old Dick!’

‘I used sometimes to sit with him like that when he was a little chap,’ said the old man, ‘and he used to hold my hand because he wanted to feel I was there. And sometimes he’d say something so that I should know he wasn’t asleep yet, and stay with him. Was it like that, John?’

‘Yes, just like that. Perhaps he was back in his childhood again, and thought it was your hand he was holding. He said something once that I didn’t quite catch—something about wet grass and a little nest.’

‘Can’t you remember exactly what it was he said, John? Do try.’

‘I couldn’t catch it. Little eggs in a nest and wet grass—that’s what I remember.’

‘Once when he was a tiny little chap, I took him to see a wren’s nest in some ivy, and he went again to see it for himself and got his feet very wet, and caught a bad cold. I sat with him that night. I remember it quite well, though I’d forgotten it for years. It *must* have been that he was thinking of, and thought I was with him.’

‘Yes, it looks like it. It was the only thing he said that I didn’t understand. At the end it was Virginia he seemed to think was with him. He was past any effort to keep her before him, but you see his thoughts were always full of her. The last thing he said before he seemed just to fall asleep was a sort of good-night to her. I’ll tell her when I see her. I’m not sure how long it was after that that he died. I sat with him for a long time. Then they came and said I’d better go. Poor old Dick—there weren’t many like him.’

The Squire sat silent, with his eyes on the ground. After a time he said: ‘Thank you, John. You’ve

done me a lot of good. I've wanted to know all this, and I wish I'd asked you before. But I suppose I wasn't ready for it. If I could have been with him it might have been different with me for the last two years. It's going to be different now. There's Virginia to think of. She's lost more than I have. But we've both got him to keep as part of our lives, though he's dead.'

'It never seems to me as if he's dead. Men like that, who have counted for a lot to others, don't die—not in your mind.'

'I suppose that's what I mean. We shall go on as if he was there. His place will always be kept for him. I think that's what Walter wants, too. He's quite right—I've come to see that—in not wanting to step into his shoes.'

'Walter has felt his death very much. He told me that it was nothing but hard work that kept him going at first. And since then he's wanted more than anything to feel that things were going on just the same at Kencote as if Dick were there.'

'Did he tell you that? Walter's a good boy, though he can't be what Dick was. It isn't many men who have so much to gain who would feel like that. But everybody does feel like that about Dick. Well, I see it clearer now that it's for me to keep things going at Kencote, as long as I'm alive, as Dick liked to think of them kept going. Perhaps it's what I can do best. I'm too old now to have much weight in the war. I make mistakes and upset people. I can do something, but——'

'I think you've done a great deal. You've run Kencote for a hospital for one thing. It's not many who *could* have done so much as that.'

'Oh, that was just one thing that there wasn't much trouble about doing.'

'It has been a pretty big thing. And aren't the things like that, which a man is in a position to do, and others can't, just what's wanted from everybody? Seems so to me.'

'Perhaps you're right, John. It's the one thing I've done that's been of some use, though it has cost me less trouble than anything. I suppose Dick didn't say anything about the war at all—while you were with him at the end.'

'No, he wasn't thinking about that. He'd given his life you see. It was off his mind. Accounts squared, you might say.'

The Squire considered this. 'That's how he took it, no doubt,' he said. 'He'd do his duty—nobody better—and leave all the rest. That's what all of us ought to do.'

'We can't do more—those of us who are out of it for one reason or another. Best just to carry on, and wait for the end. Take it as it comes.'

The Squire sat for a long time looking on to the ground, and then raised his eyes to the hills. There was sorrow in them, but no longer perplexity, or irritation.

He rose from the seat. 'I'm glad I came out here,' he said. 'But I shall be glad to get home again where I belong, and Dick belongs.'

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